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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIANCOURIER

Easter issue



We are resurrection people

A breviary of Easter Prayers

We are tired

O risen Lord, we are so tired of all the inadequacies of life, the muddle of our experiences. We have tried hard, Lord, to make ourselves acceptable to you. We have tried to find peace in our own efforts to do better. We have tried to be brave in our set-backs.

He arose – “just as he said. . . .”

He overcame death – our death. The power of sin and evil broken. The debt of sin wiped out. We confess him Saviour and Lord. We share in his righteousness. We share in his victory.

We are resurrected with him in a new life. The power of his resurrection is ours. Our own resurrection from the dead is assured.

Now, Spirit of Christ, by your grace, bind our hearts to the reality of your resurrection. May we experience the joy of your victory over the death of our sin.

We are wounded

Risen Saviour, our problems will not go away. We know of sickness for which there is no healing, pain for which there is no relief.

As we keep our eyes on your resurrection, you keep your eye on our cares, our fears, our sorrow and our doubts.

It suddenly dawned on the women that early Easter morning: “How will we move the stone?”

Heaven is concerned about our problems. Before the women set out, an angel had already rolled the stone away. Heaven’s action was purely for the benefit of the women. For Christ there were no physical barriers anymore.

The resurrection is God’s personal assurance that our Saviour is concerned about our total well-being.

But as the stone was no match for heaven’s power, so our problems are no match for your loving care for us, dear Saviour. Instill in our hearts the blessings of your resurrection.

We are silent

Lord, it feels like certain moments and settings are unsuitable to speak up for you. Even in comfortable company we find it hard to talk about your love. We find reasons to avoid suitable moments. We know, Lord, that we should talk to our kids. To our neighbours.

Following his resurrection, Jesus transported himself to Galilee and gave “the eleven” the Great Commission: the disciples must make disciples and those disciples, more disciples. They, and we all, must tell the resurrection story. And what led up to it. And what it will lead up to.

Witnessing in New Testament days was as difficult then as it is today. Many of his disciples paid a high price. But witnessing with our voices and lives will also bring great joy when we see lives restored, new havens of love created.

We confess that we, not the challenges of the Great Commission, are the problem. Cause us to speak, Holy Spirit, help us to do it, with wisdom and gentle courage. We know you will add your blessings.

We are resurrection people

Risen Lord, help us to cherish our brothers and sisters. Help us to think charitably of them. Help us to comfort them, to correct them in charity, to support them with our resources. Holy Spirit, bring joyful revival to Christian congregations everywhere.

Jesus’ friends are found around the resurrection event in bunches.

The women, “their hearts filled with fears,” were together.

When Mary Magdalene drifted off by herself, she capitulated to fear. When Thomas was not with the disciples that first Sunday, his faith was no match for his doubts.

We of the resurrection treasure fellow



These banners, designed by liturgical artist Nancy Chinn, hang in Washington National Cathedral.

believers. We help, comfort, teach and correct each other. We belong together. Easter people are church people.

Lord, we pray for the younger members of the church. As they leave home, dear Lord, make them seek Christian company. Keep them, Lord, within the fellowships of faith. In your covenant mercy, make them

strong in temptation.

Praised be the name of the Resurrected Lord.

AMEN ➤

This meditation is by Louis Tamminga (ljamminga@yahoo.com), a retired CRC pastor. He served churches in Canada and the U.S., and is author of The Elder’s Handbook.

News

Egypt's current regime: new and unimproved

Plus, parallels to *Les Mis*

Dena Nicolai

When the newest film version of *Les Misérables* was released in Cairo in early January, it was an immediate hit. While North Americans have long been in love with Victor Hugo's story of the redemption of Jean Valjean, Egyptians resonated most strongly with the young revolutionaries on the Paris streets. Egyptian social media was abuzz with quotes from the revolutionaries' songs, but which aspects of those revolutionaries' story appealed – and how the story was interpreted as a whole – depended on each Egyptian's view of the state of their own revolution. Some hopefully quoted the resounding lines of “Do you hear the people sing,” and called on the blood of the martyrs (as Combeferre does in *Les Mis*).

*Will you give all you can give
So that our banner may advance
Some will fall and some will live
Will you stand up and take your chance?*

Others were less confident and drew sadly on little Gavroche's lament instead:

*There was a time we killed the King
We tried to change the world too fast.
Now we have got another King,
He is no better than the last.
This is the land that fought for liberty –
Now when we fight we fight for bread!
Here is the thing about equality –
Everyone's equal when they're dead.*

Aside from the fact that they may have been missing the (arguable) eschatological vision also present in the English translation of the songs, the film gave a voice to the way many Egyptians have been feeling. However, even those echoing the first, more optimistic chorus, agree that the second has a point, and that their disappointment with their elected president, Mohammad Morsi, and the Muslim Brotherhood is only growing. While the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party's founding statement asserts that it is “seeking the achievement of the sublime objectives of this revolution,” Egyptians have been accusing them for months of reverting to regime tactics instead of reform. In particular, the nepotism that was a hallmark of the Mubarak regime is rearing its ugly head once again.

“[Morsi] won the elections fairly and he has taken the position. But what we are seeing from his policies is becoming unconvincing,” says Tamer El-Sahhar, a 25-year-old copy editor and videographer from Cairo. Though Tamer is trying to take his criticisms of Morsi decision-by-decision (as opposed to many on the streets who say they simply want the President to go), he adds that “it is very obvious now that Morsi's choice for critical positions like minis-



Rousing revolutionary refrains from *Les Mis*...



... are echoed by revolutionaries in Egypt today.

ters and governors... are chosen on one standard or qualification only: their level of loyalty to the Muslim Brotherhood.”

Other Egyptians complain that they are seeing this across Egyptian government bureaucracy as well, and it is worrying. In addition to the future ramifications of this monopolization, Tamer points out that the nepotism is damaging the current capability of the government. “Because you don't put the right man in the right position... the government in power now is totally helpless, weak and without a plan, and this was represented perfectly in the train crashes and accidents that we have seen recently,” he says. The accidents were due to poor training standards in departments overseen by government ministries.

One-man dialogue

Tamer is also uncomfortable with the way Morsi's government is engaging with the secular Egyptian opposition, which has united under the banner of the “National Salvation Front” (NSF). Though Morsi has called for a “National Dialogue,” he seems less than willing to listen, and many opposition leaders feel ignored. The NSF refused to meet U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in early March when he visited Cairo, due to perceived American support of the Morsi government. The *Egypt Independent* newspaper also reported that the NSF is boycotting parliamentary elections, scheduled for April 22, “on the grounds that there are not guarantees for the integrity of the electoral process and no neutral government to oversee and manage it,” as well as charges that current electoral laws further nepotism.

However, the NSF itself is also facing harsh criticism from Egyptians, who are wary of some former regime figures present in the party, as well as the politicking in which the NSF has become enmeshed. “What [the NSF has] been trying lately is running after political gains and they are not trying to win the street's opinion to their side. Obviously this is really, really important if they want to [live up to their name] of ‘National Salvation!’” says Tamer.

Ahmad Maher, a leader of another opposition group, criticized the NSF in a column for *Al Youm Al Sabaa*, an Egyptian paper;



The new Coptic Orthodox pope, Tawadros (here, being elected), is not afraid of criticizing government.

he spoke for many when he pointed out that the opposition is forgetting the people.

“The battle to overthrow the regime is not only the departure of Mubarak or the departure of the military power or even the departure of Morsi,” he wrote, “but it is a long-term battle that will not be resolved in one round... The people are crucial in that battle, as they were crucial in the beginning of the revolution, and we have to look around a little and ask ourselves: Is Tahrir Square the same Tahrir Square? Are the marches still marches? Are the sit-ins the same? Is the ‘violence and chaos followed by army rule scenario’ the revolution? People are a crucial element, a maker of change, and in order to move forward they must be reached, talked to and convinced of the importance of defeating the forces of the past for a new future. But the ‘act first, decide later’ approach will only cause further loss of time, effort, and the lives of young people.”

Uneasy economy

The actions of both Morsi and the NSF are also not reassuring Egyptians about the growing concern that is on everyone's mind: the economy. Economic instability is, perhaps more than any other factor, driving Egyptians to look back on the pre-revolution days with nostalgia.

“[Many people] want everything to become ‘normal’ and even more than before, there are many who say they want Mubarak back,” says Ismail Snosy, a 26-year-old from the desert oasis of Siwa. “They are losing their jobs and their money.” There are also growing fears (whether substantiated or not) among the millions of Egyptian civil servants as to the future ability of their government to pay them. In U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's early March meetings with Morsi, he emphasized the importance of getting the economy “back on its feet,” perhaps through an International Monetary Fund loan, but nothing has been settled in that regard.

For Coptic Christians in Egypt, attention has been on the tack their new pope, Tawadros II, is taking. While the late Pope Shenouda was careful not to publicly criticize the Mubarak regime, hoping in this way to protect his people, Copts were frustrated by his seeming acquiescence to the status quo.

Tawadros, however, has been more vocal. In an interview with the Associated Press in early February, Tawadros expressed clear criticism of the new constitution, which he says discriminates against Christians and other minorities. He was also wary of Morsi's poor attempts at discussion.

“We must and will actively take part in any national dialogue in which we see a benefit for the nation,” Tawadros told the AP. “But when we find that a dialogue ends before it starts and none of its results are implemented then we realize that it is not in the interest of the nation.” It is a sober note to follow the hopeful spirit that was present among Christians during the Christmas feast (a national holiday), during which secular and Muslim members of the opposition gave gifts of candy and desserts to Christians outside of churches, and unusually large numbers of Muslims attended Christmas services across the country as a show of solidarity with Christians.

Though the French Revolution as a whole stands on its own in history, the particular protest depicted in *Les Misérables* (the student revolt of the June uprising of 1832) was crushed by French authorities, and many Egyptians are cognizant of the reality inherent in any French Revolution parallels: such things are neither tidy nor quick (the French Revolution, in any true sense, took decades).

Yet Tamer remains hopeful: “I don't think people are giving up, not at all. The revolution is still on, but the idea is... how does it go from here? I don't believe that violent protests and chaos would be the answer or else it will turn ugly like many of the previous revolutions around the world.” However, he finds it difficult to maintain the same level of optimism he held a year ago. “Things are going terribly slowly sometimes, but I always believe that it's always the darkest hours before the dawn,” he says, echoing the other refrain from *Les Misérables* that at least a few Egyptians are still singing, even if it's quietly:

*For the wretched of the earth
There is a flame that never dies;
Even the darkest nights will
end and the sun will rise.*

Dena Nicolai
is a student in the Master of
Christian Studies Program at
Regent College in Vancouver.



Reformed Christians recognize the moment of harvest in China

Part II on China's Reforming churches

Ron Rupke
“What can Christians in the Reformed tradition offer the new church God is growing in China?”

Two young Presbyterians organized a conference near Washington D.C. in early January 2013 to answer that question (see *Christian Courier* March 11 for the first installment of this two-part series). The three-day conference spent the first day on the background, the second on the context and the third on the future of reformed church development in 21st century China.

First, a young OPC missionary outlined the history of Presbyterianism in China. Three names were particularly notable. Robert Morrison, a member of the Church of Scotland sponsored by the London Missionary Society, was the first Protestant missionary to China in 1807. Morrison translated the whole Bible into the Chinese language. A later 19th century missionary, John Livingston Nevius, is noted for promoting the principles of (church) self-propagation, self-government and self-support – ideas which the Communist regime distorted to control Chinese churches as the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Finally Hunter Corbett, another notable American Presbyterian missionary, founded the school which became the first Chinese University.

Dr. A. Donald MacLeod, professor of Church History at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, provided a living link with the North China Theological Seminary (NCTS) and its founder Dr. Watson Hayes. Dr. MacLeod outlined the entire history of NCTS from its founding in 1919 to its closing by the Communist regime in 1949. According to Dr. MacLeod, this seminary began as a protest against theologically liberal teaching at Qilu University. Its founding president Dr. Watson Hayes was a protégé of B.B. Warfield, and shared with him a conservative Reformed understanding of the scriptures. Alexander MacLeod (father of A. Donald MacLeod) taught New Testament theology at NCTS from 1933 to 1941 (when he was interned in a Japanese POW camp), and again from 1948 to 49 (when all foreign missionaries were expelled by the communist regime.)

A panel discussion of delegates from five different NAPARC churches (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council of churches) spoke of the work each denomination is currently doing in China. This varied from support for seminaries in China, sending of missionaries, translation of Reformed literature and short-term mission projects. A Canadian Reformed delegate told how his church's support for a Chinese home mission outreach in the Vancouver area in 2000 has grown into a broader Chinese outreach. Presently Canadian Reformed Churches provide catechism materials to more than 40 churches in China – some of them house churches, and some Three-Self churches. A delegate from the Korean Presbyterian churches told how this denomination supports more than 3,200 missionaries within China, and has been formally approached by the Chinese government to train leaders



of the Three-Self churches to minister more effectively!

Cultural context

Dr. Wright Doyle of the Global China Center (globalchinacenter.org) began day two of the conference with a presentation called *The Social Conditions of Ministry in China Today*. Dr. Doyle grew up on the island of Formosa (now Taiwan) as the son of an American army general assigned as liaison with the Chinese Nationalist government. Perfectly bi-lingual, and with a keen understanding of Chinese culture, he shared his insights on the rejuvenation of this ancient country. According to Doyle, immense problems accompany the many positive changes in today's China. Women experience workplace discrimination; families are breaking down; there are record levels of suicide, especially among rural women. The one-child policy has resulted in many social problems, including the fact that many elderly people feel isolated and abandoned. There is moral breakdown, “money madness” and endemic corruption. Everyone lies to one another, and expects to be lied to. Medical care has been marketized; many experience emotional and mental breakdown. Politically, Communism as an ideology has been widely rejected, and there is a real question of whether the Communist party controls the army, or vice-versa. Into this bleak landscape, the community of Christ in rapidly growing numbers injects salt and light. The greatest growth is in unregistered house churches and small Bible study groups. The government still attempts to control the content of religious teaching, but there have been relatively few incidents of physical suppression of Christians in recent years. Foreigners who proselytize are viewed with suspicion, but Chinese Christians have the freedom to share their faith. Dr. Doyle concluded with the observation that the great challenges to the gospel are materialism, shallowness of faith and false doctrine.

A theologian from Reformed Theological Seminary presented the idea of a biblical model for church governance, and how a Presbyterian model of inter-church oversight might help the very young churches in China. A professor from Westminster Seminary in California spoke on the reformation teaching of two kingdoms, and how that idea may be helpful to developing churches in China today.

A tactical God

The conference's third day was devoted to looking at the future of the Reformed faith in China. Dr. Peter Lillback, president of Westminster Theological Seminary told fascinating stories of his encounters with spiritual seekers



Dr. Lillback

while teaching government-sponsored courses at Chinese universities.

“We are doing work that is totally legal and upfront in China,” he claimed. “For some reason, this moment is harvest time in the Chinese mission worldwide. All of us have to say, ‘Here I am! Send Me!’”

The stories and interactions of this conference continued during break-times, mealtimes and after hours. A veteran PCA missionary speaking on the last day of the event said that, despite his initial reluctance to travel to the U.S. for a church conference, he now realized that the event was of strategic importance.

At the conference closing, I was quietly reflecting on Wybe's question to his professor friend at Syracuse University: “Do you still believe that Mao was good for China?” Perhaps Mao and his policies have a role in world history like that of Joseph's brothers in Genesis 37, Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah 24, or Caesar Augustus in Luke 2:1! 🙏

Ron Rupke lives in Cobourg, Ont. Reformation Heritage Books plans to publish the conference proceedings of China's Reforming Churches, with a target release date of spring 2014.



This conference was of “strategic importance,” a veteran missionary said.



Interaction between attendees continued during meals and after hours.

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Editorials

Educational Apartheid



Kathy Vandergrift

"Many of us are giving up because we can't get a proper education." This plea from an aboriginal student captures the urgency of improving education for aboriginal children in Canada. I was hopeful that progress would be made when the last Throne Speech promised a new national Aboriginal Education Act before 2014. Perhaps this would be one aboriginal issue where Canada would be "idle no more." Now I fear that children may lose out again to the power struggles between aboriginal and non-aboriginal political leaders, which are primarily over energy developments on aboriginal lands. One approach that might be able to bridge the concerns of all parties is the independent school model familiar to many readers of *Christian Courier*.

The need for systemic reform is well documented. Per student funding for educating aboriginal children on reserves is about one third less than funding for non-aboriginal children in provincial school systems. The auditor general confirmed that the gap is between \$2,000 to \$3,000 per student per year. Over 50 reserves need new schools, while many others need substantive repair to meet minimum standards. Libraries and textbooks are inadequate. In practice, education often competes for funds with other essential services, and often there is not a school board or other body to focus on education from the perspective of the students. The outcomes are well-known statistics about high dropout rates, low achievement levels and inadequate preparation for adult life. "For aboriginal youth in Canada," stated the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates, "there is a greater likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system, including detention, than there is for high school graduation." Structural reform is essential, as well as increased investment.

Good arguments have been made on the basis of the right of aboriginal children to an education and to equitable funding with non-aboriginal children. This was a significant focus, for example, in all reports on the rights of children in Canada submitted by civil society groups for review by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in September 2012.

Others argue on the instrumental basis of the need for training future workers that Canada will need in an aging society. Aboriginal young people are an increasing proportion of the under-18 population in Canada.

This raises concern in aboriginal communities that governments will use education as a tool to assimilate their young people into off-reserve jobs and then take their land. The shadow of residential schools hangs heavy over the current debate. Aboriginal leaders are rightly concerned about parental and community direction in shaping the education of their children. Similar to faith-based education, they assert that their religious beliefs and cultural values need to shape their schools. The federal government, on the other hand, focuses on fiscal accountability.

A better way

The independent school model could help resolve this tension, especially as it works in the four western provinces, where such schools receive public funds. It gives communities a high degree of control over the kind of education offered to students, and it provides rigorous measures of accountability for the use of public funds. In a few places promising partnerships are forming between independent school systems and aboriginal bands, in areas like curriculum development and school governance. In Alberta, for example, aboriginal schools in the Northlands School Division are working with the Prairie Center for Christian Education on ways to imbed themes like creation and earth-keeping in their school curriculum.

The model most likely to be proposed in the new federal legislation is aboriginal regional school boards, working closely with public school boards. This model has worked well in some

places in British Columbia. In other places aboriginal leaders are more suspicious of public schools. I hear them when they wonder why the Department of Indian Affairs harasses them about accountability for every dollar but does not ask questions about public school systems that get funds for their education but do little to help aboriginal children succeed.

The more the new Aboriginal Education Act reflects the features of independent schools, balancing space for communities to direct education for their children and fiscal accountability, the more likely it might succeed in bridging the current gap. This approach could help ensure that the right of aboriginal children to a quality education that respects their religions and cultures is realized. That should be the top priority. ✂

In 2012 Kathy Vandergrift led a comprehensive research project on children in Canada with a focus on vulnerable ones, including aboriginal children. Kathy is a policy analyst with a Master's Degree in Public Ethics living in Ottawa.

You go, Hugo!



Bert Witvoet

Hugo Chavez is dead. The Venezuelan leader succumbed to his fight with cancer on March 5 of this year. My first inclination was to say, "Good riddance." But I checked myself, realizing that such a response would be unfair, if not downright un-Christian. Hugo Chavez was a human being, made in the image of God, like all of us. And he did by all accounts care deeply about the poor in his country. What was not to like about him from my standpoint was his personality cult, his demonization of opponents, his unwillingness to see that he was ruining the economy and the social fabric of his country. His legacy is not good news for the poor. In the end, he sold them a bill of goods.

Chavez's idol was the revolutionary Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. From Castro he learned to ride roughshod over democratic practices like freedom of speech and respect for human rights. Like Castro, Chavez painted himself a democrat, when in reality he was a deluded autocrat. Besides Fidel Castro, his international friends were the likes of Bashar al-Assad of Syria and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran – all of them haters of the West, in particular the United States and Israel.

The poor people loved him because he gave them subsidized housing, better educational opportunity and improved health care. Chavez was a charismatic, courageous leader who gave the lower classes hope. He was a populist leader. But therein lies the problem.

Populism is a political movement that often arises when economic disparities grow wide. It expresses itself in revolutionary tactics that upset the status quo and in the process can cause lasting damage to the social and economic fabric of a society.

No wonder one of the Christian parties in the Netherlands used to be called the Anti-Revolutionary Party (AR). It stood within the tradition of Kuiperianism. Its philosophy was based on Groen Van Prinsterer's rejection of the French Revolution's anti-historical and godless declaration of freedom, equality and brotherhood. Many Reformed people in the Netherlands supported the AR party.

Justice, not equality

High-sounding proclamations of freedom and equality often focus on human rights as the foundation of citizenship instead of God's calling to fulfill our mandate on earth. Canadian society, too, has seen a radical transformation from a focus on God-ordained tasks and roles (often misunderstood and wrongly practised, to be sure) to an over-emphasis on human rights. All the liberation movements – for women, for abortion, for gays and lesbians, for children, for Natives – seek their justification in an emphasis on rights.

The problem is that these cries for freedom, equality and brotherhood that drove leaders like Castro and Chavez into their messianic roles as liberators do not usually translate into real freedom, true equality and lasting brotherhood. Such leaders end up oppressing large groups of the population as they present themselves as harbingers of hope.

Yet we must recognize that all these liberation movements turn out to be eloquent accusers of an unjust status quo, of the unrighteous excesses of capitalism and of the oppressive nature of paternalism. Although Venezuela rejected colonialism under the Spanish in the 1820s and became independent, the effects of such colonialism are felt for a long time afterwards. Add to that the exploitation of international corporations, especially in countries that have rich resources (Venezuela is a major exporter of crude oil) and conditions for poverty and inequality cry out to high heaven.

I am reminded of movements like Idle No More in our own backyard, a movement which at first arose out of a concern for problems within Native leadership, but has since morphed into a confusing blend of discontent with the overall state of inequality in Canada. Here, too, we must acknowledge the validity of many complaints and to search for real justice for Native people. It's a little too easy to point out the failures of these liberation attempts.

At the same time, we do well to avoid concepts like autonomous freedom, total equality and universal brotherhood outside the full scope of our calling to realize our potential as human beings. God calls us to seek justice, not necessarily equality. We are called to a freedom to build, to serve, to love, to make room for each other, not to a freedom from religion, from government, from authority, from institutions.

Maybe brother Hugo Chavez is in a place today where his longing for freedom, equality and brotherhood is fully satisfied. Maybe he is asking Father Abraham to send a message of true justice and freedom to his beloved Venezuelans. Unfortunately, we know Abraham's answer. ✂

Bert Witvoet lives in St. Catharines, Ont. One of his last political acts as a teenager in the Netherlands was to distribute AR election pamphlets, for which he was paid two and a half guilders.

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Letters

Not all 'distrust and anger'

With interest I read "Fractured Flocks: A Leadership in Crisis in the CRC" by Peter Schuurman (Feb. 11, 2013) and took it as general information. Then I read "One More Pastor Out the Door," by Virginia Miller Lettinga, which takes a look at one specific congregation and one pastor. I wonder how helpful this is. There are many examples too of humbleness, forbearance, forgiveness, patience and sacrifice [...] with credit going to no one of us.

Allan Smit
Prince George, B.C.

Preaching: further resources

One cannot read the articles about "Fractured Flocks" and not be moved by sadness. But if we go to the Scriptures we will discover from 1 Cor. 1:10-31 the Apostle's help on preaching and for us as congregants a new perspective on our response.

For more help on this subject, purchase a copy of a sermon on verse 18 of the above chapter by Alistair Begg (a Baptist minister with Reformed leanings): "The Pulpit: its Power and Pitfalls," from **Truth for Life.org**.

John Heeg
Caistor Centre, Ont.

Stronger sermons essential

The numbers are shocking, the pain deep, the failure profound ("Fractured Flocks," Feb. 11, 2013). When faced with failure we are apt to counsel love and prayer. Nothing against that, but failure also requires that we act. To paper-over bloated expectations in the pew or mediocre performance in the pulpit is no virtue. We must find the cause and act on it. Is there a profile of these congregations and of the pastors? Are there commonalities that point to a cause? This issue must be given top priority at all levels of the denomination.

Your excellent feature article points to several contributing causes. They warrant further study. In addition to Schuurman's list, we need to ask how well the seminary prepares pastors and what is the state of preaching in the pulpits?

From my experience, there is much good preaching in the CRC, also among recent seminary grads. Yet there is some poor preaching too, poor both in content and delivery. Some sermons are subjective, mostly about feelings, Jesus and me; others are moralistic. But church is about religion, not morals. If we reduce religion to morality we have capitulated our cause because there are many good, decent, highly moral people who never see the inside of a church. In church we meet and encounter God.

Sound preaching discloses who God is because the Bible is God's self-revelation. The Bible is neither a self-help guide nor a book of morals; it is a book about God.

Self-help and morality can be found outside the church. We under-cut our witness if in a vain attempt to be relevant we choose to compete on the turf of Oprah and Green Peace. We will never win there; witness the history of mainline churches. Yes, we are to experience inner wholeness, be our brother's keeper and care for the earth but that is the fruit of faith in God. The church exists to know God and nurture faith.

Poor delivery is a different problem, much easier to solve. Effective communication is an art, it takes skill, it has to be taught, it requires intentional practice and it is hard work. Poor delivery is a problem, but only a technical problem. We need to determine if a pastor might benefit from a refresher course in communications. Easy! Have all pastors, denomination-wide, submit periodically a few video-recorded sermons to a panel of qualified non-clergy for grading, not on content, but on composition and delivery.

The issues are painful. Doing nothing is not an option. This needs to be addressed!

Nick Loenen
Richmond, B.C.

Less respect for 'professionals' is a good thing

"Fractured Flocks" is a fantastic article – balanced, well researched, and hits on many of the issues. Thank you for publishing this.

The paragraph before "Hurt" in Schuurman's article refers to the erosion of the professional office in general in society and assumes that this is a negative shift. Lawyers, doctors, nurses, educators and many professionals right now are experiencing the same thing. While some may be cynical of this erosion given their experience of authority, I'm sure that others have found positive things in this shift. The doctor is no longer expected (by everyone) to be an expert who doesn't have to look things up, and doesn't have an immediate answer. Instead, he works with the information and knowledge of his client.

I have this often in my own practice, when students and parents come as experts in my field. My choice is to become offended and dig my heels in as an "expert,"

or use it as the beginning of a good conversation towards our shared goals. We can learn from one another in service of the education and growth we hope to achieve.

Likewise, pastors can choose to be offended that their professional position of authority is challenged by questions or other information, or they can invite feedback and work together toward mutual growth within their congregation. This does not have to include giving up a position of expertise. In fact, it may even underscore it.

In short, I don't think that the eroded respect for "professional" office is such a bad thing. Shared servant leadership is certainly a wonderful and emerging opportunity for the church, and in my mind represents a MORE attractive career choice for young people.

Kevin Huinink
Guelph, Ont.

Preventing pastor-church breakdowns

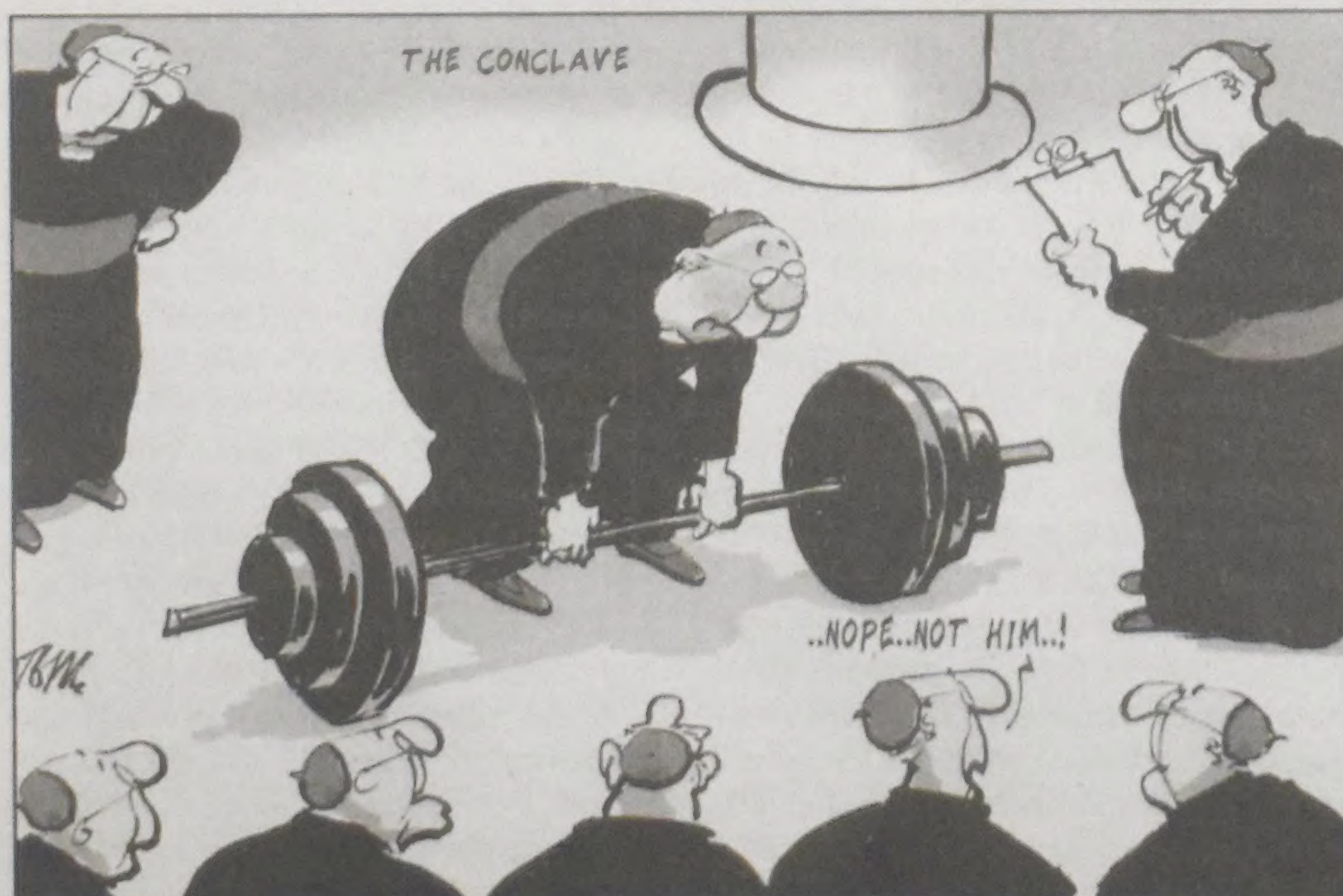
Rev. Melle Pool

Thank you for the good work of *Christian Courier*. Thank you especially for printing the articles by Peter Schuurman and Virginia Miller Lettinga (Feb. 11). I believe that the concerns they address need much attention in the CRC.

I have had the privilege of serving the CRC as an ordained pastor in various capacities. Several decades ago I made the issue of pastor-church separations a matter of special study and ministry focus. By now I have been involved in more than 20 situations as a counsellor and as a pastor for churches in which separations occurred. It has become clear to me that a complex set of interconnected factors sometimes push pastor-church relations to a breaking point. It is not just because of the pastor or just because of the church council. When the "wrong" mix of interrelated factors converges, separation can happen in any congregation. I believe that the complexity around pastor-church relations keeps growing in our time and that the CRC needs new ways or renewed ways of doing things.

In 2006, I brought a small group of people together to discuss this question: what makes for satisfaction and dissatisfaction in pastor-church relationships? The group included three regional Pastors, two Transition Ministry Specialists, the Director of CRC Pastor Church Relations and the Regional Director of Home Missions for Western Canada. All of those present had seen the high spiritual, emotional and financial cost of breakdown.

See Preventing breakdowns on page 6



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News

CRC's publishing arm hits rocky financial road

Marian Van Til, with files from CRCNA

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan – A year ago, Faith Alive Christian Resources, the publishing arm of the Christian Reformed Church, launched a plan to increase its revenue.

The resulting good news was that fiscal 2012 revenues exceeded the prior year's revenues for the first time since 2006. But there was bad news, too, and it took precedence: the plan "failed to bring in enough money fast enough," resulting in a Decem-

ber announcement by Faith Alive that it would cut some staff positions and not fill others. The cuts amounted to reducing staff by 18 percent.

Director Mark Rice had earlier told the staff that cutting positions would be "the last thing" they would do, but that step became "an option we can no longer avoid," Rice told Faith Alive employees in an email at the end of the year. In fact, without drastic changes, Faith Alive will be out of money by June 30 this year.



Preventing pastor-church breakdowns *continued from p.5*

I wrote a six-page report on the findings of this discussion, which paved the way for the eventual creation of a part time Pastor-Church Relations consulting position and a classical Pastor-Church Relations Committee made up of trained counsellors, mediators and pastors. The consultant and the committee play a big role in fostering healthy pastor-church relationships in Classis Alberta North. I will briefly summarize our conclusions, which are important for today.

Personality check

Pastors must attend to the formation of their character and relational style in ways that are faithful to the working of the Holy Spirit. Institutions that train persons for ministry need to make that a significant component of preparation for the ministerial office.

Reality check

A congregation's unrealistic and vague expectations of the pastor contribute significantly to the pastor's, and his or her family's, stress. This gets worse if the church has no safe place or ways where frustrations can be discussed with trusted people, and potentially creates burnout.

Set up support

Pastor Support Teams can offer a space for performance reflection, give protection when members engage in hurtful or offensive behaviour towards the pastor and educate the congregation about the work and role of a pastor. Some pastors' resistance to such teams should not keep a council from putting one in place.

Care for spouses

The vulnerable position in which a pastor's spouse finds herself or himself needs careful understanding. How do they relate to members of the congregation who openly criticise their spouse? How do they deal with being uprooting when their spouse's work ends in a congregation or retires?

Overhaul the 'call'

Our present calling system needs renewal. We see long pastoral vacancies, mismatches between pastors and congregations, no built in demand to seek outside help and long waits for some candidates. We function quite indi-

vidualistically as congregations. An overseeing person or body appointed by Classis with the authority to place and move pastors may be a helpful and healthy way for our times.

Leave-taking wisdom

Pastors need to know when their time is up in a congregation. Sometimes they can stay long and at other times they need to leave soon. Ministry contexts change and the pastor's circumstances change. Wise pastors know when to leave and wise church councils know how to raise the subject with their pastor in a way that is mutually beneficial.

Council's role

Mutual performance review of office bearers needs renewal. Training is required where it is not taking place or not being done well. Healthy and respectful ways of reviewing the performance of the pastor with trusted persons needs to be built into the way that a church council works.

Outside insight

The roles of Regional Pastors, Mentors and Church Visitors need to be reinvigorated. Right now, their limited authority diminishes their input to mere advice. Church Visiting and Mutual Performance Reviews are good ways to hold ourselves accountable.

Take responsibility

The behaviour of one person affects the behaviour of others in a church, just as the performance in one area of ministry or staffing affects others. We are plugged into each other for good or for ill. The health or dysfunction of the whole church hinges on the interplay between all the parts. When the wheels are off a car, replacing the driver will not make to car move. Replacing pastors in an unhealthy congregation is not helpful if the church as a community is not taking responsibility for its own health, including that of pastor-church relationships.

I am sharing this with the belief that what we saw in 2006 is relevant for us today. I believe that a conversation needs to take place on a denomination wide basis regarding satisfaction and dissatisfaction in pastor congregation relationships.

Rev. Melle Pool
Stony Plain, AB



Faith Alive Christian Resources, which has provided churches with material for over a century, faces drastic changes to stay afloat.

Multiple factors

The revenue plan for 2012, which was approved by the agency's board, had included new marketing strategies, the hiring of a new field sales representative and Synod 2012's approval of additional Ministry Shares (formerly called "quotas") from church members across the continent. Faith Alive expanded its digital publishing and distribution channels of distribution, and developed a new Sunday school curriculum called DWELL.

Although the additional monies helped, Faith Alive realized by late last year that it would be unable to meet its budget. Rice admitted then that the situation was "unstable," and that "further action is required."

While Faith Alive is not alone among Christian publishers experiencing financial problems, that is small consolation, say observers. In the U.S. the 2008 recession, chained to a massive national debt, is having an ongoing impact. In addition, there is a "diminished preference by churches for Reformed materials." Sales of the new Sunday school curriculum have not grown as fast as Faith Alive projected. There is also heightened competition among publishers, and the general costs of running ministries has risen.

'Leaner, flatter'

"Faith Alive must face the fact that it is a smaller ministry than it was seven years ago, and these reductions are designed to create an organizationally leaner and flatter ministry that must better focus on its core strengths," Rice told CRCNA communications director Chris Meehan.

Late last month in response to the crisis, the board of trustees of the CRCNA, which oversees all CRC-related agencies and missions, endorsed a plan that would lead to Faith Alive becoming part of "an overall 'faith formation' program or ministry for the CRC." The board noted that for this to happen, a change in Faith Alive's organization and governance would have to occur. One of those changes will be to dissolve Faith Alive's separate board of directors by June 30 (which must be approved by Synod 2013).

However, "exactly what" that faith formation focus is and how that will happen "is in discussion," said Rice. "Faith formation," he said, "is a broad term that encompasses all the ways in which congregations build an active and sustained faith commitment to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God among their members. It includes such diverse functions as education, worship, leadership development, congregational revitalization and others."

Meehan noted that at present "many

CRC agencies and ministry offices, such as Home Missions, Pastor-Church Relations, Disability Concerns, Faith Alive and others, all do important work in these areas." The challenge is to differentiate how Faith Alive might do its own peculiar kind of faith formation.

New direction, not demise

Rice emphasized that despite the difficulties and remaining uncertainties, "Faith Alive is *not* going out of business, or closing its doors. Faith Alive is not going away." Church members will be happy to hear it. Chris Meehan notes that the CRC has produced Sunday school materials for a century. "Faith Alive as an agency was formed over 45 years ago. For over 25 years it has financially operated as a self-supporting publishing ministry of the CRC, mostly dependent on sales of product for financial stability for its core publishing functions."



Director Rice emphasizes that the ministry is not closing its doors, just redirecting.

The new direction is inevitable. Rice said, "Faith Alive will probably produce or help produce resources that are especially focused on meeting the current needs of congregations, rather than attempting to reach a wider Reformed audience in the traditional manner of publishing, getting books ready to hit the market and then needing to promote books and other materials."

Rice added, "It may also mean serving as a conduit by creating a web of distribution streams among churches that have created their own effective faith formation ministry tools which should be shared with other churches. . . . The goal will be to implement strategies, share best practices, and create resources that will better serve the faith formation needs of the congregations."

In the meantime, Mark Rice wants congregations and individuals to know that they "should not hesitate to order materials, as they have always done, from Faith Alive, with confidence in its continued ministry."

News

Ottawa: Conservatives fulfill election promise with new Office of Religious Freedom

Marian Van Til, with files from CTV, EFC, LSN, Adrian Helleman

OTTAWA — Two years after the Conservatives made an election promise to establish an “office of religious freedom,” that office has taken shape and an “ambassador of religious freedom” has been appointed.

In announcing the formation of the office Prime Minister Harper said, “This is not an office to promote a particular religion. This is an office to promote religious diversity and religious tolerance around the world.” The inauguration took place at the Ahmadiyya Muslim community centre and mosque in Maple, Ont.

The office’s “ambassador” will be Andrew Bennett, 40, a former civil servant (Privy Council Office) and dean of the small, non-demoninational Augustine College in Ottawa. Bennett holds a PhD in political science from the University of Edinburgh, an MA in history from McGill University and a BA from Dalhousie University. At the time of his appointment Bennett was working part-time towards a degree in theology (Eastern Christian Studies) at the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute for Eastern Christian Studies, Saint Paul University. Bennett was ordained as a subdeacon in the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in 2011.

‘Values Canadians believe in’

Upon accepting the ambassadorship Bennett reiterated Harper’s assertion that the office will “promote religious freedom, freedom of conscious, freedom of belief, around the world.” Bennet said that doing so is “part of Canada’s principal foreign policy” and part of the “values that Canadians believe strongly in: freedom, democracy, rule of law and human rights.”

Bennett also noted that the new office has both a national and international focus that will include “building awareness about the issue of religious freedom abroad” and “interacting with the various communities here in Canada



New ambassador of Religious Freedom Bennett (R) shakes hands with Muslim cleric Malik.

who are in the diaspora from these areas where religious freedom is not respected.”

Bennett continued, “We live in a pluralistic society here in Canada where all religions are respected, and that certainly is going to be the goal of this office. . . . It’s a human issue, not a theological issue. So, all religions, all people of faith, and again those who choose not to have faith, need to be protected, their rights need to be respected. And so, that’s what this office is about.”

Canada is just the second country in the world to establish a religious freedom office. It is modeled after the U.S.’s Office of International Religious Freedom, which was set up under the wing of the State Department.

Don Hutchinson, vice-president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), was one of six panelists consulted by the government during the planning for the office. He told Don Martin of CTV’s “Power Play” that a number of non-government agencies have already been working on the issue of religious freedom and persecution, and so this new office will help pull all the results together. The office will “consult broadly with Canadian religious leaders who are aware of persecution in their own nations and their own

religious communities,” said Hutchinson. “The government of Canada advocates for human rights, and this office will prove a strong supplement to that.” He also noted that the office can help verify that claims of religious persecution by would-be refugees to Canada are true.

‘Has the heart and smarts’

Hutchinson believes that Bennett was an excellent choice for the ambassadorship. “As both an academic and [religious] practitioner he will have a terrific impact, and will enhance continuing consultation so that the office does not become stagnant,” Hutchinson told Martin. And on an EFC-related blog ([Activate CFPL](#)) Hutchinson said Bennett “has the heart and the smarts for this responsibility. He will do well. We will also now have the opportunity to contribute to the development of an active office rather than an idea.”

Though Hutchinson noted on the blog that “the largest faith community in Canada, and the planet, is Christian” and that “Christians are also well documented to be the most persecuted on earth,” he “hopes the office will establish a multi-faith advisory council.” He thinks that’s necessary because “Canada also has a history of freedom of worship and practice for people from other faith communities as well. It will be important that an advisory council to the ambassador be representative of this diversity, with particular attention to communities facing persecution outside Canadian borders. Establishing such a council would be a primary task.”



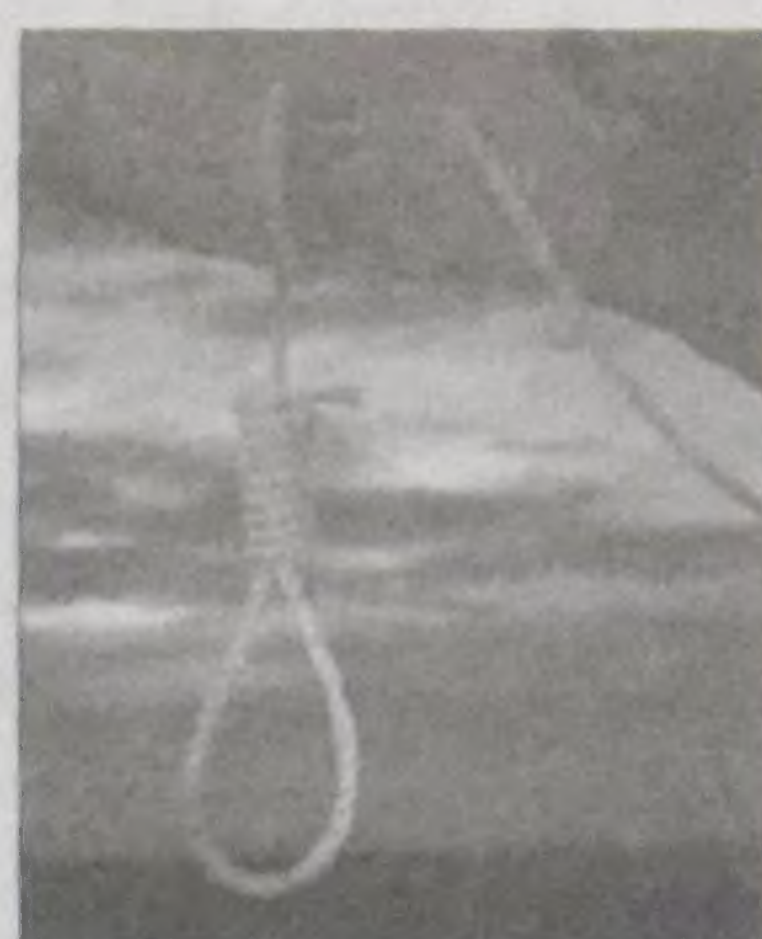
Although Hutchinson admits that the office’s annual budget is “relatively small” (\$5 million), he insists the office “has great capacity if working with the many non-governmental organizations already engaged on the issue. We have a great network of such organizations in Canada.”

Pakistan: Court asked to drop death penalty for blasphemy

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (CWN/Agenzia Fides) — Human-rights activists in Pakistan are petitioning the country’s Supreme Court for the removal of the death penalty in the country’s law against blasphemy.

The Asian Human Rights Commissions (AHRC), with support from other human-rights groups, is also asking the government to drop blasphemy charges against Sherry Rehman, Pakistan’s former ambassador to the U.N. Like other politicians who have dared to suggest amendments to the draconian law, Rehman now faces criminal charges. According to the AHRC, the Supreme Court arrested Rehman “to gain popularity among Islamic fundamentalists.”

Critics of the Pakistani law say that blasphemy charges are often false, and that criminal complaints are filed, as in Rehman’s case, as a means of settling personal or political scores. “The use of blasphemy has become a practice to limit freedom of expression and thought in society, and is now used by the courts to deny the people the right to discuss issues related to the misuse of laws by the fundamentalists,” said the AHRC.



Many blasphemy charges are false, used to settle personal scores.

Vatican library to go digital

ROME (CCO/TNW) — The Vatican Apostolic Library will shortly begin to digitize more than 1.5 million items in its collection as part of a five-year project funded by the Polonsky Foundation.

The library is one of the oldest in the world, established in 1448. It contains some 80,000 codices and 1.1 million printed books. By preserving ancient manuscripts in digital form, the libraries will ensure that copies are readily available for scholars to reference, even as the originals may deteriorate.

The project involves a number of organizations and institutional partners including Oxford University’s Bodleian Library, the Polonsky Foundation and the University of Heidelberg.

Among the works to be digitalized will be the famous incunabulum of Pius II’s *De Europa*, printed by Albrecht Kunne in Memmingen no later than 1491, and the 42-line Latin Bible of Gutenberg, the first book printed with movable type between 1451 and 1455, says the Vatican. An *incunabulum* is a book that was printed before 1500 (plural *incunabula*).

From the collection of Hebrew manuscripts will be the Sifra, written between the end of the ninth and middle of the 10th century, “probably the oldest Hebrew code to have made its way to us,” says the Vatican. Included, too, will be an entire Bible written in Italy around 1100, biblical commentaries, Talmudic commentaries and liturgical, philosophical, medical and astronomical writings.

Finally, the Greek manuscripts which will enter the digital collection are testimonies of the work of Homer, Sophocles, Plato, Hippocrates, as well as texts of the New Testament and of the Church Fathers, many richly decorated with Byzantine miniatures.



Digitalizing ancient manuscripts both preserves and makes them accessible to more people.

The digital Vatican collection will include old Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and early illustrated copies of the New Testament, among other items.

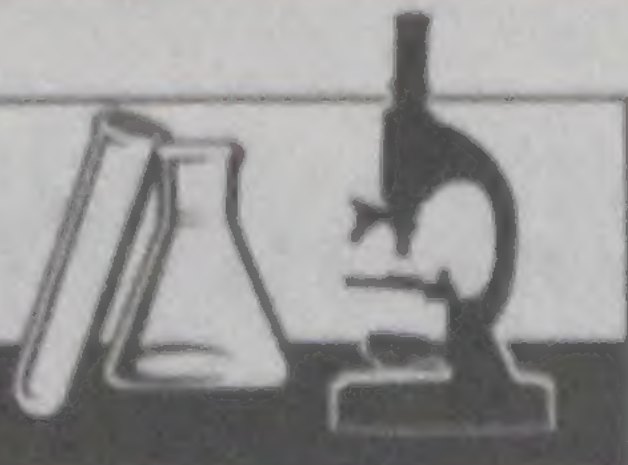
The Vatican collection includes more than 80,000 manuscripts, 8,900 incunabula, and 1.1 million printed books. Vatican librarians are anxious to preserve some of the priceless older works in digital form because the originals are subject to deterioration from age and repeated handling.

The EMC Corporation is making 2.8 petabytes of computer storage space available for the digitized collection of the Vatican Library. The storage space will allow for the first steps in a nine-year project to preserve the libraries in digital form. A petabyte is equivalent to 1 million gigabytes, or 1,015 bytes.

Columns

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



Francis Collins is an evangelical Christian who currently heads up the National Institute of Health (NIH) in the U.S. In the past he was heavily involved in determining the pattern of the human genome (our genetic DNA), and his high profile and ability led President Obama to choose him for what could be argued is the top medical health research post in his country.

Before he took on the NIH responsibilities, Collins, with the help of many others, set up a web-based organization called BioLogos Foundation (biologos.org), which seeks to help Christians understand and address faith-life science issues. Collins was concerned about the number of young university students he encountered who felt that they had to give up either science or faith to maintain their integrity. He wanted these students (and others) to realize that science and faith were not an either/or choice. Rather, one can be an evangelical Christian and a scientist dealing with the

Leading like Daniel: Calvin's Haarsma new President of BioLogos



Collins, an evangelical, helped set up the BioLogos Foundation to encourage dialogue.

findings of modern science in a way that respects the truth of general revelation as much as that of special revelation.

It was, Collins believed, possible to hold a theistic evolutionary point of view that was respectful of both our traditional Christian faith and modern evolutionary theory. The BioLogos site tries to give its visitors a place to observe and participate in a dialogue between people with different points of view, as well as to open up a space for Christians



Christians can disagree on origins, Haarsma says.

in the modern scientific community.

After Collins' departure, BioLogos continued to develop resources for Christians struggling with issues around faith and the life sciences. For example, the foundation partnered with Highway Media and put out a wonderful DVD titled "From the Dust: Conversations in Creation." This documentary brings together some of the main players in the science/faith dialogue and gives them an opportunity to speak; I highly recommend it for those interested in this issue.

Opposite sides are OK

In January of this year, BioLogos appointed Deborah Haarsma, a physics professor from Calvin College, as president to lead the organization. This appointment highlights the important role that our Reformed community plays in the discussions between faith and science.

Some of you may have come across Haarsma's name because of the wonderful book she wrote with her husband Loren Haarsma for Faith Alive, "Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design, and Evolution." In this book the Haarsmas respectfully and accessibly lay out some of the different options that Christians have taken in exploring the questions of origins, and they provide much of the evidence that science has found about God's world. They do not recommend any particular direction or extensively support any position; instead, they argue that Christians can in good faith take opposite sides of a discussion on origins. Their ultimate desire is that all Christians join together in the salvation that is provided in the death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ despite differences about how our origins are understood.

Christian educational institutions face a difficult task. They are charged with teaching our children and this responsibility is carried out in conjunction with their parents and community. We all take on a responsibility for our children as a community at baptism, and this means the authority of our schools and universities is tempered by the responsibility to God's word and will as understood by the Christian community. In some cases, this restriction limits the ability of scientists to discover God's truth when it leads to conflicts with the current community understanding. Thus the Haarsmas' book is more about opening possibilities than it is about taking us in a direction, one that I think the science requires.

BioLogos has made an excellent choice in appointing Deborah Haarsma; Calvin's loss is the Christian community's gain. Conversely, I hope that in her position with BioLogos, Haarsma gains more space and freedom to explore difficult questions, to open up what may prove to be dead ends, to help us see the wonders of our Lord in his creation, to discover the direction our Spirit is leading us in the 21st century after our Lord walked this earth. This space and freedom is sometimes difficult to find in Christian educational institutions that have to balance the search for knowledge with the weighty responsibility of teaching our children. Pray for Deborah Haarsma, BioLogos as an organization and for Francis Collins, along with other Christians, who have taken on public responsibility as Daniel did in his day.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



While David Suzuki laments the demise of wildlife species, new evidence suggests that a human sub-species previously thought endangered is – in fact – more common than sociologists thought.

This human sub-species, which goes by common names such as "customer service rep" or "sales clerk" or "bureaucrat," has long thought to be in decline in both numbers and health. Here are reports of sighting made from our home base in British Columbia.

Thoughtful response

Steffen had to have the heater on his large GMC pickup truck repaired twice at a cost of nearly \$500. Receiving little sympathy from the local dealer for this rather large repair bill for a standard item that normally runs the length of the car, Steffen wrote a letter to GMC's headquarters. He received three telephone calls to his house from the same customer service representative, who then arranged for a \$200 service voucher usable at any GMC dealer on any of his family's vehicles, whether GMC or not.

Small courtesy

I purchased some no-name™ dishwasher detergent at a supermarket at about half price of the name brand. It worked fine except that – as Betsey quipped – you needed more than a cup of it to wash a small sink full of dishes. I wrote to Loblaws, the manufacturer, and received a response in one day with this note: "... thank you for contacting us. We are committed to getting better every day and your feedback is one of the best ways for us to do that." Enclosed was a \$10 gift card.

Genuine interest

I had a question about dung beetles and sent it to the entomologist at the Ministry of Forests. Here's the reply I received from Ken White: "Hi Curt, I spent a little time looking into this for you and have come up with the following information [which follows]. "If you have more [questions], give me a call and I'll see if I can help you. Thanks for your interesting question."

Although the news stories on television and newspaper are often about Senators who think their job is a ticket to expense bonuses and cabinet ministers who forget that they

Endangered species still thrives



Many public servants are doing the best they can to be helpful.

are called to be responsible public servants, we would do well to think about those who are truly doing the best they can to be helpful. "Helpfulness," after all, is a rough translation of what it means to be a deacon in the New Testament.

Beyond the stereotype

A friend of ours faced a difficult decision about a job. In this position, he'd spend about two-thirds of the time on interesting and challenging tasks – just the right sort of job to grow into. The other part, however, involved meeting with Joe Public and collecting fees and fines. It is the sort of job guaranteed to make one a villain.

Here's what my wife, Betsey, wrote in response:

It seems as if you are leaning strongly toward taking this job, for good reasons. My only suggestion is to view the less desirable part of the job as a learning experience.

Last week I had to phone Revenue Canada to ask about the form for claiming the HST rebate for the church, and the lady who helped me went out of her way to find the best way to do it to benefit our church, even explaining that the way we were doing it was incorrect and that there was a much better, simpler and cheaper way to do it. It turned out to be a very positive experience.

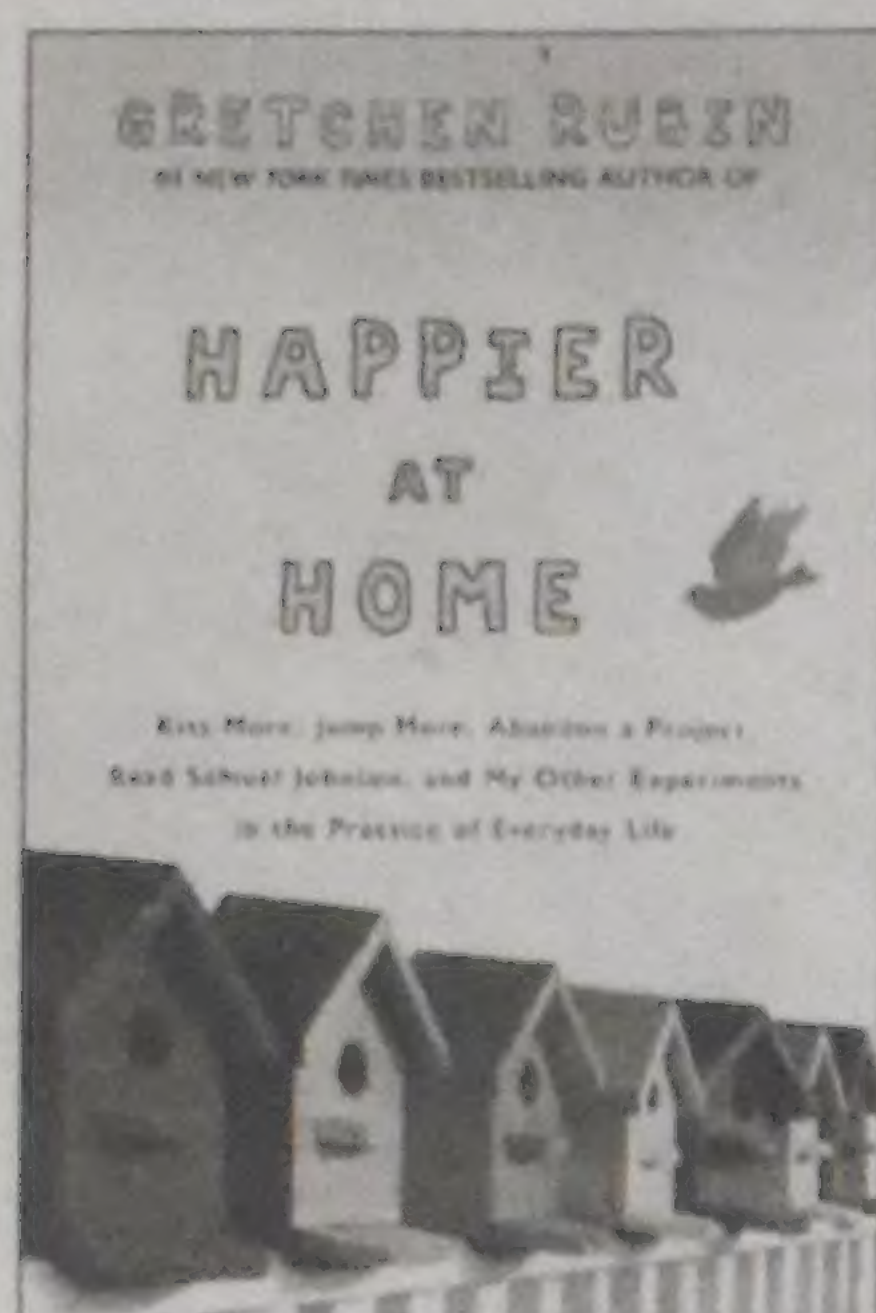
That is the job of a bureaucrat, helping Joe or Josephine Public makes his or her way smoothly through the maze of the system, as well as helping Joe see what benefits exist for him in the system. [...] Many people think that bureaucrats are unfeeling, picky rule-enforcers. Maybe it's part of a job like the one you are considering to change that perspective.

Perhaps it is time for us to include sales clerks, service reps and bureaucrats to our thanksgiving prayer list this coming Sunday.

Betsey Gesch is married to Curt Gesch, with whom she collaborates in farming as well as editing his columns.

She is also an accounting clerk in Telkwa, B.C. She leaves the task of studying dung beetles to Curt.

Reviews



Happier at Home
by Gretchen Rubin
Doubleday Canada,
2012, 253 p.

Happy now?

Angela Reitsma Bick

Sooner or later everyone wonders, “Is this really it?” Even when things seem to be going well, contentment is elusive. We can’t help pressing the point: “What do I want from life, anyway?”

This question inspires some people to switch jobs, buy new cars or explore Buddhism. Gretchen Rubin, however, is more methodical. She dedicates a year to being happier right where she is. But it’s no spiritual quest; Rubin is agnostic. She’s also an academic at heart. After researching happiness philosophies, she drafts happiness-boosting resolutions (92 of them) and keeps as many as she can handle. Her efforts are documented in *The Happiness Project* (2009), and even the title tips you off to her conclusion. Being happy is hard work.

The book had instant fans. People like putting “be happier” on their to-do lists, or at least like reading about Rubin’s attempts. More academic than most self-help stuff and more accessible than a psychology text (but with similar strategies, like “Act the Way I Want to Feel”), Rubin’s first book shot to No. 1 on the *New York Times* Best Sellers List. Combined with her popular daily blog, its success guaranteed the recent sequel – *Happier at Home* (2012).

I found the first book intriguing, even though her determination to become happier seems counter-productive, and accurately assessing happiness levels seems impossible. The breezy prose hooked me, and I kept jotting down ideas I wanted to try myself (*start one-sentence journal, get office candle, buy pedometer*).

Unfortunately, the second book leans too heavily on the framework and research of the first. *Happier at Home* feels like a tiresome rerun – especially when whole sentences are plucked out of *Project* and recycled in *Home*. What begins as a combination of insight and cliché turns into déjà vu. A few notable exceptions are her resolution to jump more: “The sheer goofiness of it always made me feel cheerier” (180); her emphasis on getting rid of anything you don’t use or don’t love, because studies show that clutter correlates to happiness; and her suggestion to tackle a task you dread in 15 minute increments. “You can stand anything for 15 minutes,” she argues.



In this *NY Times* interview, Rubin (at home) quips that the success of her books makes her happiest.

husband? Senior hedge fund partner. With a sitter and a housecleaner (never mentioned in the books), she has more time than the average mom to “create a shrine to smell.”

But those facts tell us more than the *Times* intended. They underscore that affluence is no happiness guarantee. Even Rubin stumbles towards that Biblical truth, though she wouldn’t call it that.

Gretchen Rubin’s struggle for contentment echoes conversations I’ve had with friends. If I could sit with the author of *Happier at Home* over coffee, I’d say “You’re not alone in the anxiety that something is missing from life. But 92 happiness resolutions won’t make much difference in the long run. Maybe don’t worry so much about answering ‘What do I want from life?’ Try tackling ‘Why am I here?’ instead. Your life matters more – and it can do more – than track its own happiness.

“Did you come across the Apostle Paul in your research?”

“I’ve found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am” (*The Message*).

“Mrs. Rubin, it sounds like material for your next book. If he can write that from jail, it might be worth looking into his recipe for happiness.”

Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of *Christian Courier*.
Reading *Harry Potter* with her daughters makes her very happy.

No soccer mom

The book’s cover, its chatty tone and snippets of family life all imply that Gretchen Rubin is just an ordinary mom, buried in laundry and trying hard to smile more. A *New York Times* article called *On Top of the Happiness Racket*, however, reveals that the Rubins’ apartment is a triplex in New York’s Upper East Side. Her



Hellbound? (2012)
Written and directed
by Kevin Miller.

Provocative film struggles to define hell

Peter Schuurman

The headliner on the movie website asks: “Does hell exist? If so, who ends up there, and why?” This documentary wants to press some buttons on Christian interpretations of hell, and it does so by interviewing writers and pastors who have either spoken or published on the subject. The film provocatively begins with the 10th anniversary ceremonies at Ground Zero in NYC and an interview with the controversial Westboro Baptist family who are protesting in the street (declaring 9/11 is God’s judgment on America for its tolerance of gay people). The spokesperson is Margie Phelps, and she declares with absolute certainty that 99.999 percent of people in the world are bound for eternal conscious torment in hell.

The rest of the movie slowly nudges the viewer to consider the severity of this and hear other historically Christian Biblical alternatives, such as annihilationism (soul death) and, more emphatically, an evangelical version of universalism (ultimately, everyone is saved).

This progression is done by moving from Calvinists like the Phelps, megachurch pastor Mark Driscoll and Michigan pastor and writer Kevin DeYoung to emergent church leader Brian McLaren, Canadian Eastern Orthodox Archbishop Lazar Puhalo and authors like Robin Perry, who wrote *The Evangelical Universalist*.

Christian teachings on hell

If you are troubled by the idea of eternal conscious torment as the fate of any soul, this film will offer you some alternative perspectives. On the other hand, reviewers like Mark Galli of *Christianity Today* critique the film for not engaging any theological professors or church historians, and for ignoring the evidence that seems uncomfortable. “The Bible will not allow us to put God in a box, even if the box is prettily decorated with the bright colors of grace,” he writes. “On this side of the kingdom, some paradoxes will never be resolved, some mysteries never unraveled.”

The filmmaker, Kevin Miller, is a graduate of the University of Waterloo and lives in Abbotsford, B.C., where he attends St. Matthew’s Anglican Church. The film is reflective of his own spiritual journey and his own struggles with the traditional teaching on hell. He prominently features former megachurch pastor Rob Bell and his controversial book *Love Wins* in the film, where Bell questions what kind of God we are worshipping if the punishment (eternity) seems so disproportionate to the crime (a few years on earth). Miller is seeking a more generous view of God.

I just wish Miller had featured some more sympathetic Calvinists, like Richard Mouw, who has said in *Calvinism and the Las Vegas Airport* that while he upholds the doctrine of limited atonement, he finds it a troublesome teaching, one for which his passion is lacking. For Calvinists like Mouw, Miller’s quest will resonate.

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Phelps declares unambiguously that 99 percent of us are headed to hell.

Hellbound? will be released on DVD May 28 (available from iTunes, Netflix and Amazon). An abridged version of the film will air on the Documentary Channel in Canada on April 1.



Filmmaker Miller (R) interviews Archbishop Puhalo.

Features

Joanna's news

Thea Leunk

What was I feeling that morning as we left the lower city and walked to the graves on the slopes of the hills outside the city walls? Sad? Certainly – my beloved Rabbi was gone forever. Angry? Oh, yes – but who to be angry at? The Romans for executing him? The religious authorities for manipulating his arrest? The crowd for deserting him? Could I have done more to stop it? I know I kept repeating that question. I am, after all, Joanna, a woman of position and wealth. My husband Chuza is steward to Herod Antipas and the manager of all his estates; we had influence to wield, an ear to whisper in. But it all happened so quickly here in Jerusalem and Chuza was miles away at the palace in Capernaum.

I can tell you that our task was a tearful, but loving one. Each of us could tell you a story of the great miracle this man had performed in our lives. He healed me – healed me in more ways than I can even name, in places where I didn't even know I was wounded. What more could I do but follow him – making sure he had a place to sleep, food to eat and fit clothes to wear. It was the least I could do for the man who had given me back my life.

We had watched, horrified, these last days – the long night in the Roman citadel awaiting the verdict, the walk to the cross and his death. Joseph of Arimathea surprised us all when he went to Pilate and claimed Jesus' body. Somehow Joseph said the right words so that we could honour our rabbi with a proper burial. As women, we could not touch his body so Joseph had it placed in the tomb by nightfall and before the Sabbath began. We followed closely and marked the tomb's location so that when we returned we would know exactly where to bring our oils and spices. We returned back to our rooms to numbly wait out the Sabbath.

Wrapped in our own private griefs, none of us spoke that dawn as we walked the quiet streets and out the city gate to the tomb. I think we all wondered if we would be brave enough to confront the Roman detail guarding the tomb and if we would be strong enough to move the stone away that sealed the tomb's entrance. I was surprised to see that it was already open when we got there, but I appreciated the groundskeeper's anticipation of our arrival.

Remember the things he had said

We walked in and found no body! We looked at each other with bewilderment. Where was it? Had it been moved? Suddenly two flashing and sparkling beings were with us. We were scared to death! Who were they? What did they want with us? We fell on our knees and hid our faces. They said Jesus wasn't there because he had risen and told us to remember the things he had said to us in Galilee and then they disappeared. Just like that – gone!

We looked at each other in astonishment – daring each other to speak first. Had we all seen the same thing? Were we all going crazy together? "Do you remember?" Mary asked. Yes, of course I remembered, but I had found Jesus' words too painful and had put them out of my mind. But now I reminded them of the time when Peter had said Jesus was the Messiah and he had told us in response that he would undergo great suffering and be rejected by the



The Holy Women at the Sepulchre, Peter Paul Rubens, c. 1611-14.

elders and scribes and be killed but on the third day be raised. "And I remember too," Mary the mother of James said, "how on our journey here from Galilee he said that he would be handed over to Gentiles and be mocked, insulted, and spat upon – he even said that he would be flogged and killed but on the third day he would rise again." Yes, he had said those things we agreed. Certainly the parts about suffering and death had come true just as he said – could the rest also be true?

"What are we going to do?" one of the younger women asked. With no body for our spices and oils it would seem that we had embarked on a fool's errand – we had come to minister to Jesus this one final time, but he wasn't there. "We should go back and tell the others," I said.

We hurried back to the city. What was I feeling? Astonishment? Of course! Could those brightly-lit beings have been angels? Anxiety? Where was Jesus now? Would we ever see him again? How could all this be true? Our story was impossible and yet we saw what we saw and heard what we heard.

Did they believe us? Of course not. They shrugged off our story as something a group of women crazy with grief and lack of sleep had convinced

themselves to be true. Peter checked the tomb and found it empty, just as we had described it to him; at least he could support that part of our story.

Where was Jesus?

The rest of that Sunday was difficult for all of us. In the middle of all our confusion and doubt, I just sat and quietly tried to puzzle it out for myself, trying to remember – as those bright beings had told us to – trying to remember what Jesus had said to us. At other times a small group of

us would sit and try to see if together we could put together what had happened that morning. But mostly, we just asked each other the same questions over and over again: Where was Jesus? What did the empty grave mean?

You know the rest, of course. That very evening others came to us to eagerly report that they had seen Jesus and had even spent the afternoon with him! And then, suddenly, Jesus himself was there and we all could see for ourselves that the reason the tomb was empty was because he was alive. Oh, it took some convincing for us to believe that it was really him and not a ghost or spirit of some kind – he showed us the marks of crucifixion on his body so we could identify him, ate some food so we could see he was human and sat and taught us what it was that had happened.

You see, the empty tomb wasn't enough all by itself for me to understand. Not even the message of those radiant beings helped. It was only Jesus himself who could do that; it was only by seeing him and being with him that I knew my Rabbi was now my risen Lord and Saviour. I'm an old woman now, my part in that day will probably never be known by those who come after me, but to those of you who are listening to my story today, remember this: the empty tomb itself means nothing – it can only raise the question: Where is he?

Where is he? Not in the tomb, not in the places where you expect him to be. Look for him to appear among you in surprising ways, for he is beyond all our expectations and he transcends all our dreams and hopes. "Look for him among the living," we were told that morning; that's my advice to you too. Look for him in the lives of those who know him, look for him wherever you see love and mercy and justice being done, look for him in smiles of joy and in eyes of hope, and look for him to come to you in person. You see, the best place to find Jesus is in your own story of resurrection and life.

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Fresco, Resurrection of Christ and the Women at the Tomb, Fra Angelico, 1440.

Features

Happy birthday, Vincent

Bert den Boggende

Vincent Willem van Gogh was born 160 years ago, on March 30, 1853, in Zundert, Noord Brabant, where his father was the Reformed Church minister. At age 16 he left school and spent the next three years in the art business, but felt called to preach the gospel. Unable to master Greek and Latin, requirements for the ministry, he enrolled instead in a training school for lay preachers in Brussels. He worked briefly with impoverished coal miners in the Belgian Borinage, sharing his limited food with them, putting his moral Christianity in action. In 1880 he decided to become a painter. Early in his career he gave himself seven to ten years to make his mark.

Popularity

In spite of a few favourable reviews, he only sold one painting during his lifetime, *The Red Vineyard*, at an exhibition in Brussels. However, a few years after his death in 1890, his paintings began to be appreciated. In 1896 his paintings were exhibited in Russia and rich Muscovites bought several. His novel technique began to exert great influence on the next generation of artists, especially the Expressionists in Germany and the Fauves in France. In fact, his paintings became so popular that in the 1920s there was a scandal in Germany involving the forgery of quite a few paintings. By the 1950s colour reproductions of his works outsold those of other artists.

His artistic development

In contrast to his contemporaries of the Hague School, van Gogh wanted to be a figure painter. He initially started with figure drawing, the foundation of his work; he delayed painting until the end of 1881. By the time he left the Netherlands in 1885 his realistic paintings were gloomily toned, with the main figures somewhat clumsy and as large as possible and without minor details. With no shadows, his perspective already started deviating from the time-honoured Renaissance ideal. For instance, in his well-known *Potato Eaters*, 1885, he remodeled the sitters and made changes in the reality, arguing in a letter to Theo, “yes, untruth if you like – but more true than the literal truth.” In Antwerp he discovered Japanese prints and Rubens’ colours, resulting in a flatter perspective and a brightening of colour. In Paris this trend continued through the influence of the impressionists and Monticelli’s intense colours of southern France. Moreover, he acquired a new type of brush stroke, which sometimes resulted in an abrupt removal of the brush. The paint was not mixed on the canvas and was often quite thick. His later works, in which he abandoned naturalism, are characterized by writhing shapes and riotous colours, especially noticeable in his irises and cypresses.

His religious development

His father adhered to the Groningen theology, an ethical-moral approach to Christianity, which influenced Vincent’s early life. As his work in the Borinage suggests, his approach to Christianity took the form of the social gospel. Events in his life suggest that this understanding did not provide him with much stability. Some art historians regard his action in the Borinage as religious fanaticism and seem to be relieved when they can turn to the art he produced in France. There he was influenced by French naturalist authors like Emile Zola and there he seemingly gave up Christianity. Always a fervent reader, he may already have been influenced by Dutch naturalist authors (the *Tachtigers*). Their faith in progress, holding this in common with positivism and evolution, and their understanding of art as art for art’s sake militated against Kuyper’s understanding



Raising of Lazarus (after Rembrandt),
Vincent van Gogh, 1890.

of art, who called the movement “fanatic and withered.”

However, it seems to me that Vincent’s Christianity and his art cannot be separated so conveniently. There is enough evidence suggesting that Vincent remained influenced by Christianity. In 1883 he wrote his younger brother Theo that he had a certain obligation to the world, feeling it his duty to convey a thought in his work and regarding his art as an expression of thankfulness and as a witness to the world. In other words, his canvases have a spiritual content. The art historian Robert Stoll, therefore, suggested that for Vincent art and life were intimately one, in contrast to Cezanne, for whom art was next to and above life, and to Gauguin, for whom art was against life. Even though he made no references to religion about his well-known *Potato Eaters*, 1885, it may be regarded as his early credo, his Christian social concern. A half year after his father’s sudden death in March 1885, he painted a still life showing a Bible opened at Isaiah 53, a burnt-out candle and Zola’s *La Joie de Vivre*. It is often interpreted as contradictory, with the Bible and candle referring to his father and Zola’s book as an indication of Vincent’s new direction. However, Zola’s book, like Is. 53, also deals with suffering, a major theme in Vincent’s life. Yet his interpretation was now shaped by the modernist theology of the French historian and philosopher Ernest Renan, whose works he applauded as liberating. In France he continued to read Scripture regularly and quoted frequently from it.

While he had an aversion to depicting Christ, toward the end of his life he stated that he revered Christ as the supreme artist, who was “more of an artist than all the others, disdaining marble and clay and colour, working in the living flesh.” To Theo he wrote that he had a terrible need of religion; then he went out at night to paint the stars. He considered colour a harbinger of the realm of the spirit, exemplified in his well-known *Starry Night*, 1889, which is imbued with mysticism (compare Is. 40:26). His symbolism goes back to an earlier period; what is new is that colour is now also symbolic. He wanted to be faithful to direct experience and religious pictures were an invention. Gauguin encouraged him to paint from memory or imagination, and although he thought briefly that it was a charming path, he soon regarded it as an “enchanted land” that drove him “up against the wall.” Hence he was loath to follow this path because it was not realistic. Commenting on his friend Émile Bernard’s *Garden of Gethsemane* he therefore stated that “It is much better to paint olive trees than the Garden of Olives,” and “To think, not to dream, is our duty.” Except during the last year of his life, this perspective, requiring always faithfulness to direct experience, kept him from inventing religious pictures.



Pietà (after Delacroix), Vincent van Gogh, 1889.

Religious paintings

After the incident with his ear in December 1888 – Rita Wildegans claims Gauguin may have lopped off Vincent’s ear rather than Vincent himself – Van Gogh entered voluntarily the hospital in Saint Rémy in May 1889, staying there for about a year. His mental illness did not affect his art, although he felt hampered by it. He still painted on average two paintings per week! During this time he painted a number of religious pictures. The first hint comes on 16 June 1889 in a letter to Theo in the form of a reaction to a supposed Rembrandt sketch, *The Annunciation to the Shepherds*, sold at an auction. He was quite impressed by “the figure of the angel Gabriel.” Shortly thereafter Theo then sent him an etching after Rembrandt, for which he thanked him on 17 August and in November he painted a half-length of an angel. Theo must have sent him other reproductions, for early in September Vincent indicated that he was busy painting a *Pietà*, using a lithograph after a Delacroix painting of 1850. In June 1890 he made still another version, not an uncommon occurrence. In total he painted 36 copies, 24 by Millet and 12 by Delacroix, Rembrandt and Daumier. These are actually interpretations, most clearly noticeable in his version of Rembrandt’s *Raising of Lazarus*, in which he replaced Christ by the sun. Other notable interpretations are Delacroix’ *The Good Samaritan* and Millet’s *The Sower*. Most copies have a social connection, depicting the disadvantaged, e.g. prisoners in a court yard and agricultural labourers. With Lazarus and the dead Christ, these disadvantaged also represent the theme of suffering. While these interpreted copies have received little attention, as busy Amsterdam’s Van Gogh Museum indicates, his other works continue to be highly acclaimed. Clearly, he has succeeded in conveying thoughts in his works and we may be thankful for his gifts to us.

Bert den Boggende studied van Gogh and Gauguin in 1974 for his MA in art history.



Features



Christian Courier is pleased to present this fourth article in a six-part series on First Nations topics. Our guest writers are author James C. Schaap and PhD candidate Seth Adema. James Schaap focuses on the CRC's outreach efforts to the Zuni people in Rehoboth, N.M., while Seth Adema, who is studying aboriginal interactions with the Canadian criminal justice system, examines Canadian concerns. We encourage our readers to offer feedback either by way of a letter to the editor (editor@christiancourier.ca), comments online at christiancourier.ca or by tweeting us at twitter.com/ChrCourier.

Residential schools: a part of our heritage

Seth Adema

I met a residential school survivor on a summer afternoon in north Winnipeg. At the time when we met, he lived in a faith-based subsidized housing complex for individuals who struggled with addiction. I have since come to question whether the word "survivor" is the best word to capture his experience. "Survivor" implies a struggle that he has overcome. Instead, he continues to struggle every day with the impact of actions by Canadian governments and churches aimed at destroying his culture and heritage. What his life story taught me was unsettling, because in learning about his life, I learned a great deal about my church, my country and myself.

This man grew up in a residential school outside of Winnipeg after being taken from his family by the Canadian government, and the destabilizing impact of the school has followed him all his life. He was forbidden from partaking in his historic cultural practices and was punished for speaking his own language. His hair was cut for the sake of making him appear more "European." Several times he ran away from the school, and several times he was caught, returned to the school and publicly humiliated to guarantee he would not leave again.

Following his eventual exit from the residential school system, this gentleman moved to Winnipeg. While the stated goal of residential schools was to prepare him for entry into the Canadian social and economic sphere, the practical effect was to remove him from his heritage without preparing him for the social, economic and spiritual challenges that he met in the city. He entered the city without support and became addicted to alcohol and drugs. When I met him, he still struggled with these demons as he attempted to work through the trauma that his life experiences instilled. I suspect this will be the story of his life.

Sadly, this man's life story is not unique, but rather fits within a much larger framework that touched thousands of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The Canadian government's goal concerning Native peoples was absolute assimilation. Prime Minister John A. MacDonald famously summarized his government's attitudes in 1887 when he stated, "The great aim of our legislation is to do away with the tribal system, and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion." The reason that the government considered schools as an ideal method to assimilate was because policymakers considered Aboriginal adults to be too entrenched in their culture while their children could still become what Harold Cardinal later termed "little brown white men."

Challenged assumptions

Reflecting on the impact of meeting that former residential school student, I realized a number of things about my own life. Until I met that man, I had a particular view of myself as a Christian, as a Canadian and as an individual. His life story fundamentally challenged the assumptions I held that underpinned my own identity.

My church was one of grace, love and mercy. The hatred inherent within the residential school system's theoretical and philosophical frameworks does not fit within the message of the Gospel. The most difficult challenge I face as a Christian who studies the history of Native peoples is the historic role of churches in residential schools. Various Christian denominations published now famous "before



Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre photograph from the collection of Rev. William Maurice (left). Residential school students (right).

and after" photos of children in residential schools. The churches published them then to show the "success" of the schools in "civilizing" Aboriginal children. What they show now is the cultural arrogance inherent within the system.

Historian John Milloy noted that while most clerics involved in the creation of the system viewed Residential Schools as "a sublime act of broadening civilization," the practical impact was to create individuals alienated from both euro-Canadian society and their own home communities. It is not difficult to find stories where the church members intentionally tried to destroy Aboriginal cultures and in doing so fundamentally damaged lives like that of the man I met in Winnipeg.

'Canada the good'

I was a citizen of "Canada the good," which was home to a beautiful, multicultural mosaic. Furthermore, Canada's status as a peacekeeper solved the Suez Crisis. In other words, Canada as a nation was a beacon of light to the world. Little did I know that Canada's actions towards Aboriginal peoples would later serve as a model for Apartheid in South Africa. This image of "Canada the good" could not be reconciled with ethnic genocide.

Realizing the underside of the church and the Canadian government, two fundamental areas through which I define myself, forced me to consider in practical terms for the first time the concept of human depravity. Could I be as flawed as my forebears?

The question was jarring.

The good news is that this is not where the story has to end.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has spearheaded investigations into the sins of the past in an effort to heal and move forward together. Mandated as "an overall holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy," the TRC has given former students and all Canadians the opportunity to heal, establish new relationships and move towards a better future.

Actively walking a path of reconciliation

Within churches in Canada an important movement towards reconciliation has begun. A number of denominations have issued apologies and in 2008 the current Conservative government did the same. In June 2012 the Christian Reformed Church in Canada formally recognized the Church's own guilt as a part of the Christian community, becoming the first denomination not directly involved with the church-run residential schools to actively walk in the

spirit of repentance, reconciliation and healing.¹

Still, there is much work to be done. The legacy of residential schools continues both in broken lives and in an unbroken chain of institutions in which Aboriginal peoples are still overrepresented. Researchers have found a staggering connection between residential schools and prisons in this nation. The vast majority of Aboriginal offenders either experienced residential schooling themselves or came from homes broken by that system. Many activists have begun terming prisons themselves as "the new residential schools." Shawn Atleo, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, recently likened underfunded child-welfare services to the residential schools. He argued, "Our children keep being taken away from First Nation families on reserve perhaps in even greater numbers today than during the residential school era."

I was recently asked what individuals could do (short of pursuing a PhD in Aboriginal History) to help further the work of reconciliation. The question is difficult to answer because there is no recipe where one can add equal parts remorse, understanding and activism and "Presto," you are reconciled! After some thought on the matter, I have reached two conclusions. First, the most significant problem that stands in the way of reconciliation is ignorance, and if individuals can in a small way shed light on the historic roots of current issues then they are taking part in the task of reconciling. Second, reconciliation can only be accomplished through establishing appropriate relationships; we cannot reconcile with one another if we do not know each other.

I struggle with the task of reconciliation because the damage done to the man I met in Winnipeg cannot be undone. Healing is more complex than any band-aid remedy. Aboriginal peoples will continue to live with the legacy of residential schools regardless of the actions taken by churches or governments. Instead the most important task that we can do as churches, as Canadians and as individuals is to walk the path of reconciliation alongside our Aboriginal brothers and sisters. ➤

¹ Full disclosure: my father Bruce Adema offered this token of reconciliation acting in his former role as Director of Canadian Ministries, CRCNA.

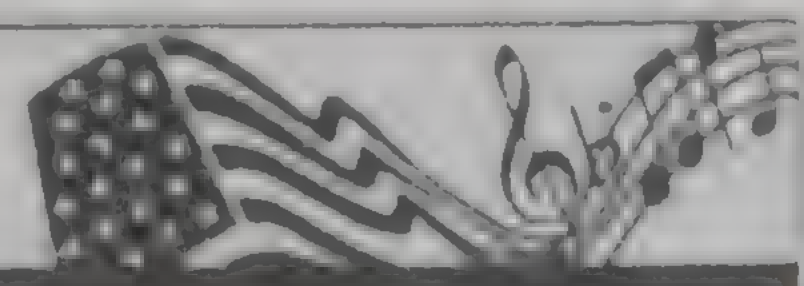
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Columns

From the 11th
Province

Marian Van Til



'Jesus lives: this truth is sure'



For years I've worked as an organist-choir director in denominations that follow the church year and use a lectionary (a three-year cycle of selected Scripture lessons). I'm no longer keen on the lectionary (it omits far too much, preventing parishioners from encountering vast swaths of Scripture they should be hearing and internalizing). However, following the church year based on the life and work of Christ – Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost – is a fine idea. It focuses us spiritually; but such cyclical observances also come naturally to us.

Cycles and routines are good gifts from God: the seasons, days of the week, sunrise-sunset, mealtimes, work, school, personal routines, daily Bible reading and prayer – a habit which expands into weekly worship with other people of God. All that repetition is helpful for us fallen people, slow learners that we are (the more so as we get older!).

So here we are at Easter again. Far from just another mark on the liturgical calendar, it is the highpoint of the church year. But after two millennia is there anything about it that hasn't been said? Or shouldn't we be concerned about "original thinking" when meditating on Christ's resurrection? Perhaps reminding ourselves of the wondrous glory and inexplicable grace inherent in this crucial part of the Old, Old Story is enough.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the lynchpin of our faith, the Apostle Paul says. "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain [or 'in vain'], and you are still in your sins," Paul asserts (1 Cor. 15:17). "Futile," "useless," "worthless." Those are the synonyms for "vain" used by various Bible translations. If Jesus is still dead, then our "faith" is mere misguided fixation, myth.

Nor is a dead Jesus a divine Jesus. He would have no power over sin – or death, obviously. And we'd be in horrific trouble: "All who have died in Christ have perished" (v. 18). Paul sinks the final nail in the coffin: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (v. 19, ESV). If Christ is a 2000-year-old disintegrated corpse and we insist he is not, we are deluded. If Christ *was* – past tense – a mere man, he himself had delusions of grandeur. C.S. Lewis famously, rightly, asserted that if Christ is not who he says he is, he could not possibly be the great moral teacher that many secular people say they'll accept. Far from it: a person falsely making the claims Christ made for himself would be a lunatic.

Incorruptible bodies

Paul's emphasis relates Christ's rising to our own future life. That life will consist, first, of being with Christ after we die (which Paul longed for). And then we will live eternally on the New Earth in our own bodies, res-

urrected and glorified. This old earth will submit to the Refiner's fire and our home on the New Earth will be a place "where the dwelling place of God is with man . . . and he will live with them" (Rev. 21:3). Our church-going days will be over, as there will be no need for churches or the church year. "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" says John (v. 22). God's presence will be immediate, everywhere around us. Pure joy!

I will reiterate the point because so many Christians seem to be confused about it: Heaven is not our final home. "Resurrection" and "heaven" are not synonymous. Paul assures us that when we who are in Christ die, we will be shown into his presence. We will be "home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). But it will be a temporary, spiritual, non-embodied home.

God created us with bodies, to live on the earth in communion with him. Our Fall into sin destroyed that fellowship, diseased our bodies and distorted this earth. Christ will return some day – a "some day" getting ever closer as the years fall away – "to judge the living and the dead." If we are not still living on that Day, we will rise ("the dead in Christ will rise first"). We will be judged. And not found wanting, "we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52). We will put on our new bodies and they will be "incorruptible," glorified as Christ's body already is. *That's* resurrection! And it will occur because our faith is *not* in vain, because Christ *did* rise, because God never breaks a promise. You can be as sure of it as of anything you would ever stake your life on.

*Jesus lives: this truth is sure. What from Christ
can separate me?*

*Evil powers I shall endure; death nor hell can
thwart my safety.*

*God shall raise me from the dust: Jesus is my
hope and trust.*

*Jesus lives: be not afraid! Take by faith Gods'
promised surety.*

*All our sins in Christ are paid: death is swallowed
up in victory.*

*God shall raise us from the dust: Jesus Christ, our
hope and trust!*

Christian Gellert, 1757;
tr. Calvin Seerveld, 1985 ➤

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ARTFUL EYE



Monuments at the Gettysburg battlefield.

CATHY SMITH

Graveyards

Arlington is no longer.

Its perfect rows of whitewashed markers
blown a thousand miles away,
all plowed up in furrowed ground,
an awesome, massive rending.

Fertile ragged soil,
unkempt and wild,
lies in heaped haphazard piles.

Gettysburg is the same,
the ancient battlefield
newly scarred and ripped,
torn and twisted,
as if a thousand cannon balls
had lashed the earth again.

In Orleans town
ancient sacred mausoleums
crack and crumble,
lie crushed in awful ruin
as in Katrina's days.

In Tombstone's sunlit desert
Boot Hill is blown apart.
Cowboys laid there,
boots turned up,
their epitaphs now gone,
forgotten words found tangled
in ravaged thorny weeds.

Across the roiling seas,
the greens of Normandy
feel once again the gash of war,
rocks and boulders tossed about,
flowered fields quick overturned.
All has gone amuck.

In lands beyond the sun,
Khmer's killing fields
are carved asunder
and further still
Rwandan ditches
open wide to brighting sun.
Green Acres no longer green . . .
my father's grave open wide.
On that great day we all will know:
it's not just One
who rises up!

Rodney J. Hugen

Cathy Smith is features editor
with Christian Courier.
She visited Gettysburg in 2008.



Rod Hugen is a pastor at The Village in
Tucson and a church planter working
for Classis Arizona (CRC).



Columns

Words from
Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

Do you have
hope?

I wonder sometimes, especially at Easter, about the Christian message of hope. In my work, I have the privilege of listening to stories that others within the body of Christ do not get to hear, of lives broken and torn apart. Many of these people have very little hope that their lives could look different than what they do in that moment. I think culture plays a significant role in this hopelessness. We're used to quick fixes, not a long, slow road. And it's harder to accept the mystery of God when we can find instant gratification in other things.

But we are all broken, whether our stories are dramatic or not. The question is whether we have hope in Christ crucified. Do we have hope in the words "it is finished"? All of us have those places within that we find very difficult to hand over to God.

If we're honest with ourselves and about our daily struggles, it's easier to:

keep looking at porn

keep masturbating

sleep with your boy/girl friend

base your identity on your feelings

leave your spouse

keep drinking

be offended

keep shopping

not forgive

Those are the moments we forget about Christ crucified. Those are the times we forget that those around us love us, and want better for us. Maybe it's shame or a deep sense of aloneness, rejection, lack of affirmation or low self-worth. Maybe we've been so abused that we can't even think of anything different. Sometimes we have lost sight of community and the importance of walking with one another. Have we lost sight of hope; have you heard any stories of hope recently?

Just coping

I believe behaviours are something that we do out of an underlying thought, perception or experience. My experience of being bullied as a teenager left me with a perception that something was wrong with me. I believed that I wasn't worth anything. Out of this place I coped with things that gave me a sense of worth. Or so I thought. I didn't have hope that things would get better or that people would really understand me. I tried to find my hope in the arms of others, but it left me feeling even more worthless. They could never be enough for the pain that I felt in my heart.

Yet I found someone who offered me hope. It wasn't in my behaviours, people or the world around me. The hope I found was in Jesus Christ, the one crucified on the cross for me. Jesus became my hope because he met me in the midst of my behaviours! He too was misunderstood, he was marginalized, he was rejected and he went to the cross knowing full well the pain he would experience for us. In this place we have hope because we are accepted at the cross every time, no matter the struggle, behaviour or attitude that we carry.

The hope of Jesus Christ transforms lives and makes all things new. But it takes work, discipline and sometimes it takes a daily giving up of the things that are not the best for us. I came to realize that being gay was not the best that God had for me. He had something far more precious and it turned out that it really wasn't about me anyway. It was about him. My Father God whose image I carry as I live out my days on earth.

So in the midst of the hard places you find yourself, remember that Christ crucified is strength enough for you. Stand firm then in the hope that lies within you, the hope of transformation. We are welcomed into the place of "it is finished" time and time again. No matter what you turn to for relief, Jesus wants you to know that he is your hope. Rise up today and take your place; make hope your friend and let it find a home in your heart.

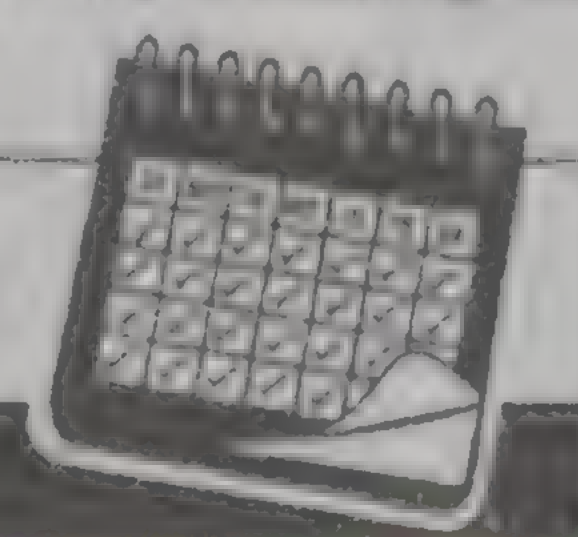
Kenny Warkentin (kenny66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.



I take the Atonement for granted, casting only casual glances at the cross

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



'Behold, the Lamb of God. . .'



As a child, my first picture of Jesus on the cross was a moody depiction in Marian Schoolland's *Big Book of Bible Stories*. I recall three crosses silhouetted against a slate-grey sky, a portrayal obliquely angled for impressionable eyes. Still, it hangs sombrely in my memory.

I was 13 when I first watched *Ben-Hur* on television. It was deeply affecting. When Jesus stumbled to his knees on the cobblestones, doubled over with the weight of the cross, I ran to the bathroom sobbing. My mom followed. Unable to calm my hysterics, she slapped me. Don't think less of her, though. It worked!

As an adult, I saw *The Passion of the Christ* in the theatre. I controlled my tears, but the raw physicality still shocked me. I watched it all – the endless whipping, the hammer blows of spikes through flesh, the thrust of the spear into Jesus's side, blood spurting in a sudden arc onto the soldier. Averting my eyes seemed a Peter-like betrayal, a denial of the torture endured for my sake, so I forced myself not to turn away.

From Advent through Lent, Christians make the annual trek from manger to cross. On Good Friday we reach our destination and behold what God himself called "accursed," a gory death upon crossed timbers. Introducing Jesus to his followers, John foresaw the scene: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." "Behold" is a better translation than "look," I think. It's dramatic and authoritative. I sense urgency. I hear a command.

I need that. There are wormy holes in my brain and heart. I take the Atonement for granted, casting only casual glances at the cross. I'm squeamish. Lazy. Busy. My spiritual life charts itself in fits and starts, jittery lines graphing through peaks and valleys, just another Israelite wanderer. I need to be guided back to Golgotha repeatedly. Like Moses in the desert with his bronze serpent, the Spirit must tilt my obstinate chin and direct my gaze so I can behold my Saviour and be restored.

In "A Crescendo of Wonder" (*Christianity Today*, 3/31/2010), Calvin College's John Witvliet describes the immensity of what we are trying to process as we gaze at Christ on the cross: "This is the day when the Living Water says 'I thirst.' It is the day when the Bread of Life hungers, the Resurrection and the Life dies, the Priest becomes

the Sacrifice, the King of the Jews is killed like a criminal. No wonder we stammer in the face of this mystery."

Parallel journeys

Witvliet's words remind me about why we cultivate imagination, why Reformed Christians are rightly passionate about staking our faith within education, the arts and culture. Madeleine L'Engle has commented, "It takes all the imagination at our disposal to comprehend a loving God, who created the whole universe, choosing to become incarnate as an infant and suffer death at the hands of his creatures." My faith is enriched, the holes in my brain and heart healed, when I behold Christ before and behind, day and night, like a cloudy pillar or fiery column. Not just in sermons, in prayer and in Scripture, but in my daily world – in literature, art, movies, science, the garden.

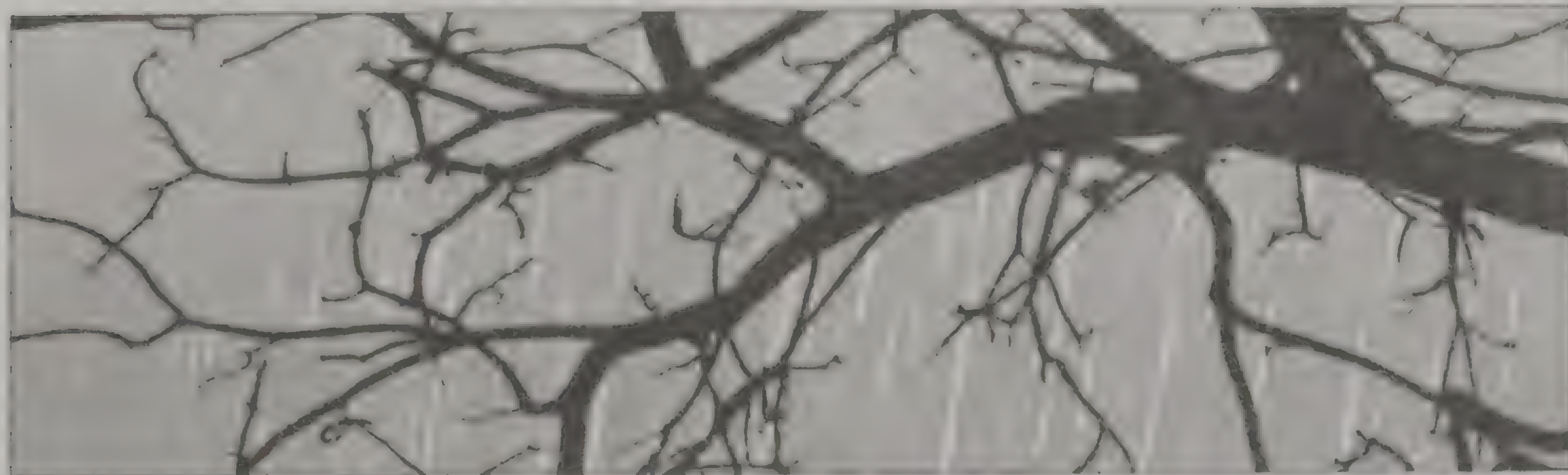
I behold Christ in *Shardik*, a novel by Richard Adams. A religious cult is finally rewarded by the arrival, the *incarnation*, of their mighty bear god, Shardik. The epic tale chronicles the rise and fall of the prophet Kelderek, who seeks to serve Lord Shardik with devotion, but who is often deeply misguided (much like me). *Shardik* descends voluntarily into the Streets of Urtah, an abyss of unspeakable misery, a journey that parallels Christ's suffering on the cross and his descent into hell. Kelderek, following his master from a distance, is also marked by this hellish experience. Later, the wounded but still powerful Shardik dies a sacrificial death, saving not only Kelderek but a band of abused slave children.

I behold Christ in *Gran Torino* when Clint Eastwood's character sacrifices himself for his neighbourhood, his arms spread in a cruciform gesture to accept the inevitable gunshot, or in *Lord of the Rings*, when Frodo models a self-sacrificial determination to complete his quest for the sake of the shire.

I behold Christ in every self-effacing and loving deed I witness. What remains is for me to *be* Christ-like, marked as his own, so that others may behold Christ in me. That's a lifetime pilgrimage. As Yale theologian Miroslav Volf tweeted this week: "Every step following Christ, every act marked by goodness, truth, and beauty, is a promise; it gives hope about the future to us and to others."

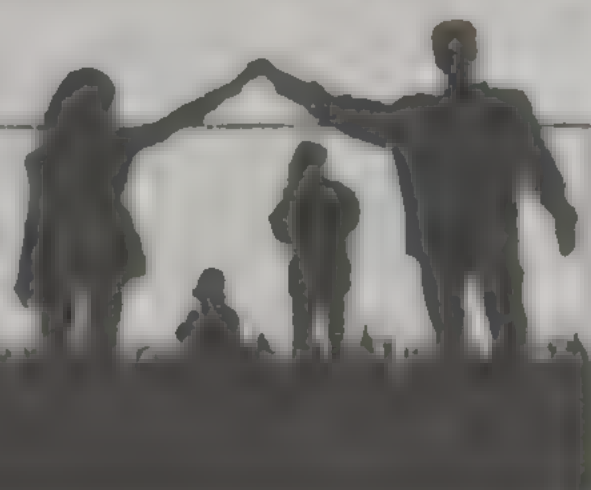
Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is Features Editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

Columns



Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



Does winter weather challenge our wellbeing?

Q I am a 45-year old married man with three children in the mid- and early teens and I am a full-time breadwinner. My wife works part-time and tends to most of the necessary aspects of running a home. Recently, she has been pushing me to do something about my “seasonal depression,” as she calls it.

I cannot argue with her because it is true that I am much more lethargic, irritable and have difficulty focusing from December to sometimes the end of February. My spouse believes I have always suffered from seasonal sadness, but I don't remember feeling this way in my teens, twenties or early thirties. There's no point in arguing about that, but I know for sure I have been feeling this sadness the last five winters. While I understand life has its ups and downs, it seems odd that for three months out of each year I feel disoriented in my own life.

A Lots of people get the blues when the days are short, cold, dark and dreary. Some ride out the darkness by making the most of the available natural light, or by eating certain foods such as fish, chicken, barley, brown rice, soybeans and peanuts. These are all great sources of tryptophan, an essential amino acid that is the starting material for serotonin, a natural antidepressant. They stay away from alcohol, a natural depressant, avoid caffeine and highly processed white foods such as sugar, flour and salt – stimulants that increase anxiety and stress. To keep blood sugar balanced they eat a diet rich in complex carbohydrates, proteins, vegetables and low-glycemic fruits such as grapes, melons and especially apples. Exercise is also important. Physical activity that works the whole body aerobically, such as brisk walking, running, swimming or cycling, as well as some weight training, has been known to chase the blues away.

But in your case, you could be suffering from seasonal affective disorder (SAD). A doctor diagnoses SAD if a patient suffers from depression, loss of energy, anxiety, irritability, loss of interest in sex, overeating, weight gain and has difficulty concentrating for three consecutive winters followed by complete remission in the spring and summer.

I suggest you see your physician. Your lethargy could be a form of depression that is linked to loss of light, which can be treated with special light therapy lamps that simulate sunshine. And sunlight activates the alertness

area of the brain.

Fewer daylight hours absorbed by the retinas of the eyes reduce important mood-altering chemicals in the brain. While you naturally store up a fair amount of the spectrum of light in the summer, you could be depleted by December when the days are short and dark. You need light for the production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that improves moods. Researchers have learned that in the fall and winter, people have higher levels of a protein that removes serotonin from the brain than they do in spring and summer.

In addition to light therapy, some theorists suggest wellbeing is about more than the weather.

The well-known psychologist, Dr. Martin Seligman, an expert on wellbeing and author of *Flourish*, developed the acronym PERMA, through which he outlines five important elements for wellbeing. P=positive emotions; E=engagement; R=relationships; M=meaning; A=accomplishments.

When we are fulfilled in these five areas we can live a rich and satisfying life:

- Feeling and appreciating positive emotions such as enjoyment, excitement and pleasure.
- Engaging with life by being completely absorbed in activities such as playing sports, being fully present for your child or focusing and finishing a project.
- Having close and authentic relationships that mutually nourish the soul.
- Developing a meaningful and purposeful life through faith, passion and action.
- Being appreciative of your accomplishments in terms making and meeting achievable goals.

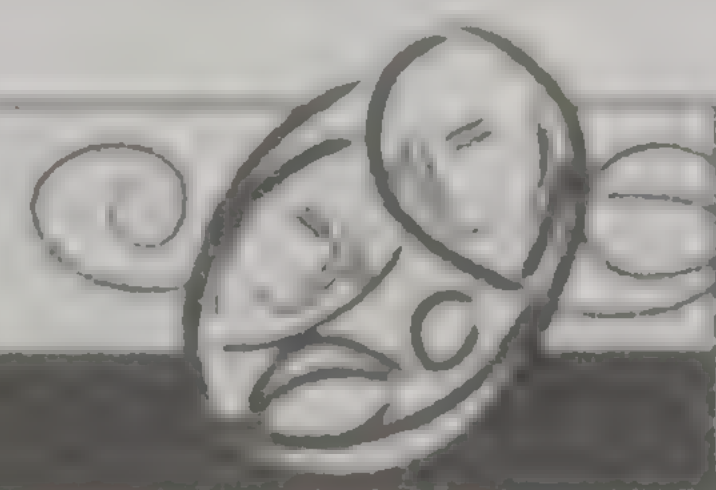
From the information you shared, it seems you would be a good candidate for light therapy. But those experiencing the winter blues may also want to adopt some of the above suggestions. A healthy diet and a hardy exercise program can rarely go wrong.

I listed the above five elements developed by Dr. Martin Seligman as a point of interest for you. They are worth pondering. And while you may have had a long, hard winter, spring is around the corner.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, B.C.

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



The one prayer I cannot pray



Aiden is talking in full sentences now, so I'm trying to make Jesus a part of our regular vocabulary, and I am putting him to bed, now, asking him if he knows how much God loves him.

He stretches his arms out wide like a cross. “This much,” he whispers. Then I ask him where God lives, thinking he'll point to his heart because we've done this before. But he keeps pointing to my eyes. Over and over. And I hope it's because he sees

Christ in there.

One night last summer, when I was at the Wild Goose Festival, I woke up to a baby crying. I lay there in my tent, waiting for someone to pick that baby up but no one did, and then I unzipped the door and stood there in a sea of 1,000 Coleman pop-ups, hearing this child sobbing and not knowing how to reach her. And finally someone must have picked her up. But that would be my personal hell, right there: hearing a child crying and not being able to comfort him or her.

And maybe this explains the one prayer I cannot pray. The one that surrenders my children.

I don't know if I could have been Abraham on top of that mountain holding a knife to my baby's neck. No, I'm pretty sure I couldn't have been. I would have rationalized that God doesn't ask people to kill innocent children.

In the same breath I know that God asks some hard things of us, and even though he ushers the little children unto him in the New Testament, he also allowed kings to murder entire cities full of babies under the age of two. Not that it made him happy mind you, but he allowed it.

So I'm scared. I'm scared to say, Thy will be done with my children – Thy full, and complete will – because what if that means taking them from me?

I know a number of you, my dear readers, have experienced the passing of your child, and I don't know that I would survive this. I told Trent once, I think I would stop breathing.

But somehow, you must keep breathing. I just cannot bring my mind or my prayers to go there. I want to be the one to save that crying child in that sea of tents.

Unto completion

I didn't know I could love anyone like this; I didn't know I could protect and nurture and fight for the rights of anyone like this, but this is why we took in Joey and Jin, and why we offered to take in another woman's baby recently (she didn't take us up on it), but don't show me a suffering child, because I WILL take him or her home.

I ask Aiden where God lives and he points to my eyes, and I wonder if it's because he knows. I see God only where I want to see him. I don't always let him into the deepest parts of me. Into my heart. Because then I might have to accept all of him.

All of God, with his mystery and his holiness and his justice. And I prefer thinking of God gathering us close like chicks, as it says in the Psalms, or knowing the number of hairs on our heads, or providing our daily bread.

Not allowing his son to die on a cross, alone, for a world that despised him.

“I once heard in the halls of Congress that the story of the salmon is a cliché. Nacer. To be born. Nadar. To swim. To swim in the river to the ocean, to dwell in the ocean and then return to the place one is born with courage and devotion to the memory that resides, presides, in the body, to fight and climb and fly up obstacles set in one's path . . . to break one's body in sacrament, just to lay one's body in cool waters, calm waters, and open oneself to birth . . . to then face the river and surrender to the river, to death, knowing community will be sustained through the intelligence of the body decomposing, dreaming itself to be born again.

If this story is a cliché, then isn't the holy seed of Christ planted by God inside the wise womb of the Virgin, carried with compassion, delivered beneath a star under the watch of shepherds to teach us, his sheep, how to live and how to die and live again with forgiveness, also a cliché?

The sacredness of Creation includes both the courage of a fish and the courage of a human being, struggling to fulfill their destiny, each embodiments of flesh and spirit.” (from Leap, by Terry Tempest Williams).

Emily Wierenga is the author of *Chasing Silhouettes*, and *Mom in the Mirror: Body Image, Beauty and Life After Pregnancy* (coming Mother's Day, 2013). For more info, please visit emiliewierenga.com.

News

Sierra Leone combats the outrage of child soldiering

The Child Soldier Initiative will train the army and police in how to engage with children in combat situations, as well as educate youths about the problem.

Alyson Rowe

Toronto, Ont.—Sierra Leone is launching a five-year program to combat the recruitment of child soldiers and run child soldier prevention programs in local schools.

The nationwide drive, the first of its kind in West Africa, will make child-rights training mandatory for the local police and armed forces and outline standards on how troops must engage with children in combat.

Sierra Leonean troops are confronting child soldiers on the front lines when they join peacekeeping missions in countries such as Somalia and Mali, where about 6,500 Sierra Leonean troops were deployed in January.

A decade after the end of a civil war in which an estimated 10,000 child soldiers were recruited, Sierra Leone has a generation of young people who have gone to war and killed. To avoid another generation growing up amid such violence, the program aims to couple child-protection training for the police and army with an education program in 45 schools across five districts.

The Child Soldier Initiative (CSI), a non-profit group founded by Canadian Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire, the former U.N. commander who led the ill-fated peacekeeping mission in Rwanda from 1993 to 1994, has designed the training manual and program for the army, police force and prison officials. CSI officials said they do not yet know how many security officials will be trained but the army has 13,000 soldiers.



Child soldiers are a problem confronting many African nations.

'Mandatory' is key

In the second phase of the scheme, now being developed, CSI hopes to train and employ former child soldiers to run the school program, which will teach children about their legal rights and explain what child soldiery is and what tactics are used to recruit children.

Sierra Leone is the first country in West



Beah's book is a firsthand account of being a child soldier in Sierra Leone's civil war.

Africa to adopt an official child soldier policy, said Ismail Tarawalie, director of internal security at the Office of National Security. Other war-affected countries like Sudan, Mali and Ivory Coast have received training from charities like CSI and UNICEF but do not have mandatory child protection training policies.

"It is an important project because it will enhance the military's capacity to meet international standards and ensure adequate training for military personnel," Tarawalie said.

The charity has raised \$150,000 for the first 18 months of the program, but executive director Shelley Whitman estimates it will cost an additional \$350,000 to run the project for five years as planned. CSI has done child-protection training for security personnel in 46 countries, but Whitman said this is the first time its goal is to train a whole nation.

Child soldiers are a problem confronting many African countries. Psychological trauma, maimed children with amputated limbs and stolen childhoods are its immediate effects. But for post-conflict countries

like Sierra Leone, its impact lingers a decade later. Many former soldiers who did not successfully reintegrate and finish school are now homeless and jobless, a generation of unskilled young adults living on the streets.

Saudamini Siegrist, a child-protection specialist with UNICEF, said CSI's long-term commitment to a large-scale security sector training program is significant because it fills a gap in post-conflict countries' rehabilitation schemes.

"Recovery from the consequences of war takes time – even a lifetime," said Siegrist.

Alyson Rowe is a fellow in global journalism at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs. This article originally appeared at AlertNet, a humanitarian news site operated by the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Film reopens torture debate

Zero Dark Thirty

Written by Mark Boal

Directed by Kathryn Bigelow

Annapurna Pictures, 2012

Adrian Helleman

Zero Dark Thirty has been billed as "the story of history's greatest manhunt for the world's most dangerous man." It is a dramatization of the American operation that killed Osama bin Laden.

The title is military parlance for the time the helicopters reached the compound in Abbottabad in Pakistan where bin Laden was residing together with some of his family.

This film has reignited the torture debate. It openly shows torture taking place and suggests that coercive techniques were essential to bin Laden's capture. No waterboarding, no bin Laden seems to be the underlying message. Yet this film does not glorify torture, even though it is central to the story; thus it is not gratuitous as in some films. Some critics have noted that the torture left them nauseated. Both sides of the debate can thus find support for their position in this film.

Three U.S. senators have criticized *Zero Dark Thirty* as "grossly inaccurate and misleading" in its suggestion that torture produced the tip that led to the capture of bin Laden. They contend that the CIA detainee who provided significant information about bin Laden did so before any harsh interrogation.

It is true that in the film torture is only used in the first part, thus one could reasonably argue that it is not central to the movie. But the use of information derived by torture contradicts this argument.

The director of the film, Kathryn Bigelow, has reacted to the controversy by explaining that although torture was employed in the early years of the hunt this does not mean it was key to finding bin Laden; rather, this involved ingenious detective work.

The most crucial part of the plot is the role of Maya (played by Jessica Chastain), a CIA officer whose brief career focused on the search for bin Laden. She is the one who drives the search. During the first few months she is involved in the torture of Ammar al-Baluchi, who is alleged to have helped transfer money to the Sept. 11, 2001, hijackers.

Ammar eventually leads the CIA to "Abu Ahmed," whose real name is Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti. He was thought to have died earlier, but he turned up alive in the suburban compound in Abbottabad where bin Laden eventually died, as did al-Kuwaiti, on May 2, 2011.

Torture is never justifiable

This film shows some of the torture techniques, such as waterboarding, that were used to extract information. CIA interrogators used this technique in which a prisoner is strapped down, forcibly pushed under water and made to believe he might drown. It is also done by pouring water over a cloth that covers the face and the breathing passages of an immobilized prisoner.

From a Christian and an ethical perspective, torture is not justifiable under any circumstance. The war on terror was used for a decade to justify torture with arguments that would never have been accepted before 9/11. The need for information, according to some people, outweighs the ethical arguments against it. But that is blatantly false.

Zero Dark Thirty does not glorify torture, but this does obscure the fact that torture has always been, and remains, not just an intelligence-gathering tool but also a crime against humanity. For that reason alone, torture must be condemned by every democratic country. In addition, torture is ineffectual and often a waste of time, since the information gained this way is highly suspect, and above all, anathema in a democracy, where the rule of law prevails.

Personally, I found the film revolting, and not just because of the torture. Like *Argo*, it glorifies the role of the CIA. Such glorification was done in the name of artistic license, but is it proper to extoll an organization that has used torture extensively in the past? The torture of fellow human beings, much less their killing, cannot be tolerated by Christians. Not even the elimination of bin Laden and other leaders of al Qaeda can be used as justification.





Zero Dark Thirty was expected this year to garner several Oscars, including Best Picture. I surmise that this did not happen largely because of the torture scenes, which voters in the Academy interpreted as providing vital information that led to bin Laden's capture and death. The only Oscar this film did receive was a shared one for Sound Editing.



This film has indeed reopened the torture debate. *Zero Dark Thirty* should prompt us as Christians to take part in the debate and protest torture.

Adrian Helleman is an academic missionary. He blogs at hellemannews.blogspot.ca.

Classifieds

Anniversaries		Obituaries
<p>HERMAN AND JOHANNA KRAAYENBRINK 1953 - March 31st - 2013</p> <p><i>Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you</i> I Peter 5:7</p> <p>It is with praise and thanksgiving to our God, that on March 31st, 2013, DV, we hope to celebrate the 60th wedding Anniversary of our Dad and Mom.</p> <p>With love from: John (Bertha), Henry (Darlene), Rick (Susan), Evelyn (Ken), Erica (John), Jim (Lucia), Robert, Anita† (Glen) 25 grandchildren and their spouses and 8 great-grandchildren.</p> <p>Home address: Sydenham Residence 70 Duke Street Wallaceburg ON N8A 5E4</p>	 <p>1953 April 22 2013</p> <p>With thanks to God we celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of our parents</p> <p>ORVAL AND ANN OKKEMA</p> <p>Congratulations, love and God's continued blessings.</p> <p>Mark & Sue, Tilda & Ed and Ray, your grandchildren and great-grandchildren.</p> <p>Address: 1101-685 Woolwich St., Guelph ON N1H 8M6</p>	<p>Tzummarum, FR London, ON January 20, 1927 February 16, 2013</p> <p>Grace Jenny Stelpstra (nee Sybesma)</p> <p><i>"The Lord is my light and salvation – whom shall I fear?" Psalm 27:1a</i></p> <p>Peacefully, surrounded by her family, Mom was called home to be with her Lord and Saviour on February 16.</p> <p>Beloved wife of Arthur for 61 years. Dearly loved mother of Anna and Jack Groeneveld – Allenford, Ont. Joan and Rafael Shoheb – Ottawa, Ont. Jack and Alice Stelpstra – Dorchester, Ont. Irene and Jake de Boer – London, Ont.</p> <p>Devoted Grandma & Beppe of 12 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. She will be dearly missed by her family & friends in Canada and the Netherlands.</p> <p>A memorial service was held on Feb. 20, 2013 in the Bethel Christian Reformed Church with Pastor Eric Groot-Nibbelink officiating.</p> <p>Correspondence: A. Stelpstra 310-170 Cherryhill Circle London ON N6H 2M1</p>
<p>Birthday</p> <p>Happy 80th Birthday</p> <p>Gerrit Jan (George) Goris On April 6, 2013 D.V.</p> <p>Gerrit Jan will celebrate his 80th birthday. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless you Dad!</p> <p>Betty and Dave Buis Jerry Goris Nancy and Hubert Krygsman Henriett and Dave Vanderlei Annette and Jack Bakker Loraine and Rick Guikema</p> <p>Love also from his growing family of 16 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren (and counting...)</p> <p><i>This is the day which the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24</i></p>	<p>With thankfulness to God we celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of</p> <p>HANS AND GERRIE KUYVENHOVEN (nee Vandenberg) Naaldwijik Netherlands - 1953 - March 24 - 2013 - Goderich Ontario</p>  <p><i>Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.</i> Psalm 124: 8</p> <p>Congratulations and love from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren:</p> <p>John & Eleanor Kuyvenhoven Jordan & Melissa Kuyvenhoven (Ava, Leah, Haylee) Janelle & Bryce Bramhill Jessa & Andy Luchies Jontue Wilma & Jake Hiemstra Sarah & Ron Haanstra (Deanna, Logan, Reid) Jill & Hugh VanderWier (Hayley, Tess, Weston) Rodney & Janel Hiemstra (Noah) Kendra & Brad Bakker (Dakota) Heather & Ryan DeVries (Bennett) Caroline & Al Groen Jeremiah, Karla, Amber Doug & Debbie Kuyvenhoven Fraser, Rachel</p> <p>We thank God for you and the many happy years we've enjoyed together. We wish you continued health and happiness!</p> <p>Hans & Gerrie's address: 777 Lakeview Trail, RR 6 Goderich ON N7A 3Y3 Email: hans@kuyven.com</p>	<p>Elizabeth Agnes Horlings (nee Verkaik) of Holland Marsh peacefully passed away at Bradford Valley Long Term Care on February 20, 2013 at 100 years of age.</p> <p>Beloved wife of the late William Horlings.</p> <p>Loving mother of Harry (Jane), late George (Audrey), Anita (Joe) Sikma, Kenneth (Joan) and Richard (Eleanor).</p> <p>Elizabeth will be fondly remembered by her 19 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren.</p> <p>Dear sister of Anne Mol, Agnes Van Dyke, Anthony Verkaik and predeceased by Jacob, George, Peter and Harry Verkaik, and Lena Terpstra.</p> <p>Friends called at Skwarchuk Funeral Home, Bradford for visitation. A Celebration of Elizabeth's Life was held at the Holland Marsh Christian Reformed Church, Ansnorveldt on Feb. 25, 2013.</p> <p>In Elizabeth's memory, donations may be made to the Holland Marsh District Christian School Building Fund.</p>
<p>Caregiver Needed</p> <p>In home Christian caregiver needed for our elderly mother in Sarnia area. Part to full-time including day and night care. Dementia experience and an understanding of the Dutch language are important. E-mail lwessenburg@hotmail.com</p>		<p>Hillie (Hilligje) Weima (nee Thijms) Passed away on March 9th, 2013 at the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance, in her 81st year, to be with her Lord and Saviour.</p> <p>Hillie was born in Beilen, Drenthe, the Netherlands. Predeceased by her beloved husband Pieter Weima (2001). Daughter of Hermannus Thijms (†1988) and her mother Jantje Boer (†1932) of Beilen, NL.</p> <p>Loving mother and Oma to: Herman; William and Sophie Sager; Joanne and Randy Crevits; (Amanda and Rich Sigel; Trevor, Ryan and Myles (†2012); (Andrea and James McConnell; Luke, Amber and Carter); Clarence and Karen (nee Krauskopf), (Yolanda, Cassandra Joy (†1988) Pieter, Wesley and Esther); Ruby and Fulvio Babich, (AJ).</p> <p>Hillie was a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Chatham since her arrival in Canada in 1954. She was a member of the church choir for many years, and always had a song on her heart. She volunteered her time at the Bibles for Mission store in Chatham. She loved knitting, & donated much of her handiwork to The Goodfellows.</p> <p>The funeral service was held at First Christian Reformed Church, Chatham on Wednesday, March 13, 2013 with Pastor Jack Kerkhof officiating. Interment followed in Maple Leaf Cemetery.</p> <p>In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Chatham Christian Schools or Bibles for Missions.</p> <p>Correspondence: C. Weima 20 Moffat Crescent London ON N5W 5X3</p>
<p>Available for Call</p> <p>The Council of All Nations Christian Reformed Church of Halifax, NS, declares</p> <p>Rev. Brad Close available for call to CRC churches.</p>		
<p>Vacation</p> <p>Holiday accomodation in Holland with vehicle rentals, tours. www.chestnutlane.nl</p>		
 <p>Housekeeping cottages (2 - two bedroom, 1-three bedroom) on Georgian Bay near Killbear Provincial Park north of Parry Sound Ontario. Sandy beach and bottom, level rock for walking, water deepens gradually. www.jacknifecottages.com. Contact us at 416-818-4505 or lynn@jacknifecottages.com.</p>	 <p>Holland Marsh CRC, Ont. is celebrating their 75th anniversary this year.</p> <p>We are planning a pot luck super on Sat. April 27 at 5 pm with a program to follow, to be held in the Holland Marsh Dist. Chr. School.</p> <p>There will be a celebration service on Sunday, April 28 at 10 am. <i>All former members are invited to attend.</i></p>	<p>TABINTA- 1948 Celebrating 65 years in Canada. Did you or your parents arrive in Quebec City on June 1st, 1948, on the Tabinta? Let's connect! I have the "Staat van Passagegelden" list to share. Alie Rietkerk-van Veen 519-529-3210 alirietk@hurontel.on.ca</p> 

Advertising

Job Opportunities

PRINCIPAL / LEAD ADMINISTRATOR – K-12



Houston Christian School was founded in 1962 and is a K-12 school with approximately 100 students. Houston BC is a small town of about 3200 residents. Our community has a strong Christian base and students come mainly from Christian Reformed, Canadian Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal families. The school is grateful for the solid and stable family character of its education program and marvels at the faithfulness of our God as alumni repeatedly come back and report how positive their experience at our school was. Over the past few years the school has focused intensely on developing more intentional Christian teaching using the Teaching for Transformation format developed by the prairie Christian schools in all curriculum areas. Houston Christian School is an active member of the Society of Christian Schools in BC (SCSBC).

Houston Christian School is accepting applications for a full-time teaching principal / lead administrator commencing August 1, 2013. In the past this principal position was 50% administration and 50% teaching. The Board is open to input on this model and is keenly interested in candidates who will commit to leading development of the school's administrative systems and procedures. The successful candidate will be expected to creatively leverage the strengths of a small school and further strengthen the school's education program and operations to the praise and glory of our God.

The ideal candidate must:

- be a committed Christian
- qualify for BC professional teacher certification
- be dedicated to Christian education
- be able to sign the school's Code of Conduct
- have experience and skill in educational and curricular leadership
- have a minimum of 4-5 years of administrative experience as head teacher, vice principal, or principal
- be committed to professional development. Preference will be given to the candidate who holds or is working towards a Master's degree in Educational Leadership
- have excellent communication abilities and work well with educators, school board, various committee volunteers, and administrative staff
- have solid comprehension and leadership abilities in all school administration and operations
- be able to lead a dedicated group of staff in serving the vision and mission of Houston Christian School

Each application must include:

- an up-to-date resume
- at least 3 professional references including pertinent contact information
- copies of university transcripts
- a written personal philosophy of Christian education and leadership

Closing date: March 15, 2013

Mail or email your application to:

Houston Christian School Ph: 250.845.7736 (school office) or
 Attn: Keith Jaarsma, Board Chair 250.845.5230 Keith's day number
 Box 237 2161 Caledonia Ave. 250.845.7832 Keith's eve number
 Houston BC V0J 1Z0 Email: kdjarsma@telus.net

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Immanuel CRC is a progressive and dynamic church serving the communities of Brampton and Caledon, Ontario, Canada. We are seeking a

Ministry Director

who will be responsible for managing and supporting our vision, staff and ministries, with the objective to enhance the execution of all our ministries.

For a detailed job description go to immanuelcrc.ca and click on "What's Happening."

All interested candidates are asked to submit their resume before March 31, 2013, along with a letter detailing their interests in the Ministry Director position, along with salary expectations to

careers@immanuelcrc.ca.

Please note that only qualified applicants will be contacted.

Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Listowel, Ont., is seeking a full time

Youth Director

We have a strong and vibrant youth program. To obtain a complete job description or submit a resume, please contact Ray Heeres: rayheeres@hotmail.com or 519-291-2040 or Bethel CRC Office: officebethelcra@gmail.com 519.291.4000.

Youth Ministry Consultant

for **Classis Chatham** of the Christian Reformed Church located in Southwestern Ontario.

The ideal candidate for this position has five years' experience and has proven skills in change management, visioning, conflict resolution and people management, and mobilizing and raising lay volunteers and leaders.

The successful applicant will train and equip church councils, youth leaders and congregations through visits, seminars and visioning. This person will also encourage, mentor, and advocate for the Youth Workers of Classis Chatham, as well as distribute information and gather resources for the churches of Classis Chatham.

Please email classischathamyouth@gmail.com for a detailed job description and application package.

Cornerstone CRC of Chilliwack, B.C.

has an immediate opening for a half time

Director of Worship/Music

The qualified applicant will have a deep love for Christ and His Church and a passion to give expression to our Reformed world-view utilizing a broad range of musical skills in a "blended" worship setting.

For a position description and to submit a resume and application please contact the church office at

office@cornerstonecra.ca or 1-604-792-2517

Calvin CRC, Ottawa, Ont., is seeking a

Lead Pastor

Supported by capable lay leaders and a full-time Pastor of Youth and Congregational Life, the successful candidate is a strong Reformed-Biblical preacher who will challenge our diverse congregation and encourage us to live as Christ's followers in Canada's capital.

Our new pastor will guide us in framing our aspirations into a new, Spirit-led vision statement and core values.

Contact Larry Vandergrift, Chair of the Search Committee, at larryvandergrift@rogers.com to request copies of the church profile and job description.



The congregation of **River Park Church** (Christian Reformed Church), located in the Canadian Rocky Mountain city of Calgary, Alberta, is seeking to fill the position of

Senior Pastor

to lead a staff ministry. All candidates should direct any inquiries and resumes to Tony Bouma, Calling Committee Chair at 403-281-7292 or email atbouma@shaw.ca.

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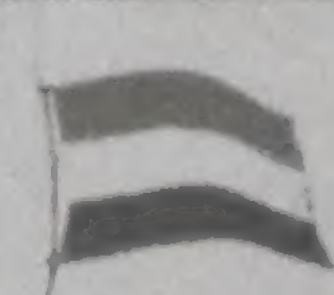
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Email:

harry@crcextensionfund.org

Call: 416-461-1207

Fax: 416-465-6367

Note: For 2013 the new TFSA
contribution limit has been raised
from \$5,000 to \$5,500

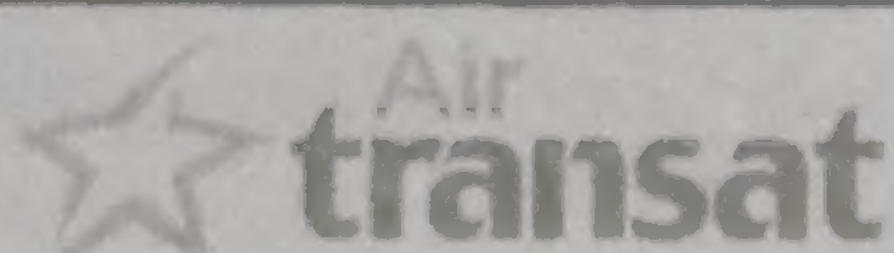
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mar 23 Dutch Theatre Group presents "Een Bomvol Hotel" Memorial
Community Hall, 8 pm. Blyth, Ont. See ad Feb 25 issue or Phone
519 424 2985 or email woodstockdutchtheatre@yahoo.ca

Apr 6 Dutch Theatre Group presents "Een Bomvol Hotel" Great Lakes
Christian College, Beamsville, Ont. 2 pm. See ad Feb 25 issue or
Ph. 519 424 2985 or email woodstockdutchtheatre@yahoo.ca

Apr 21 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed
Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Zantingh will be preaching. DVDs
are available.

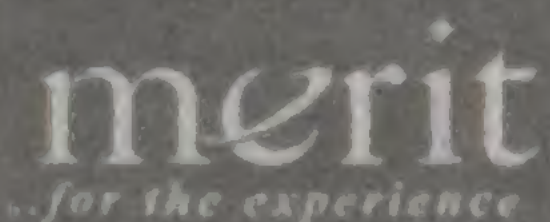
Apr 27 Holland Marsh CRC, Ont., is celebrating their 75th anniversary.
See ad.



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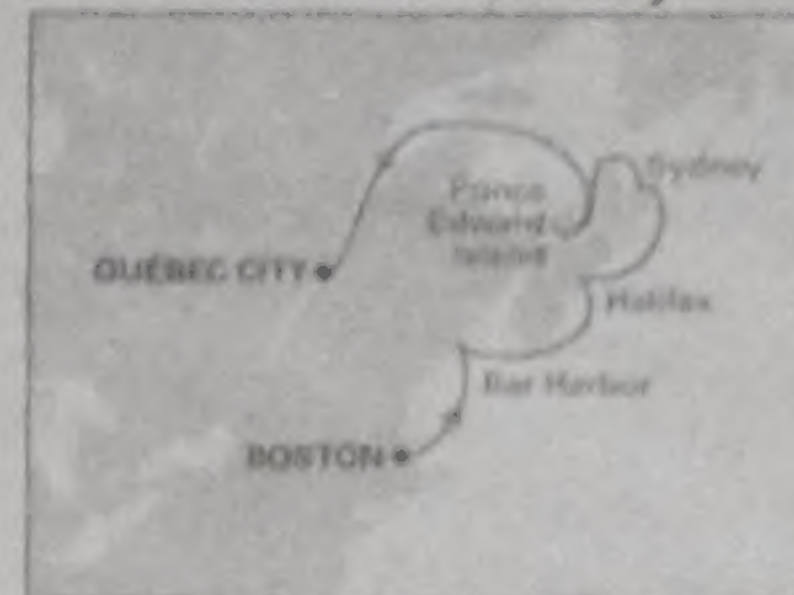
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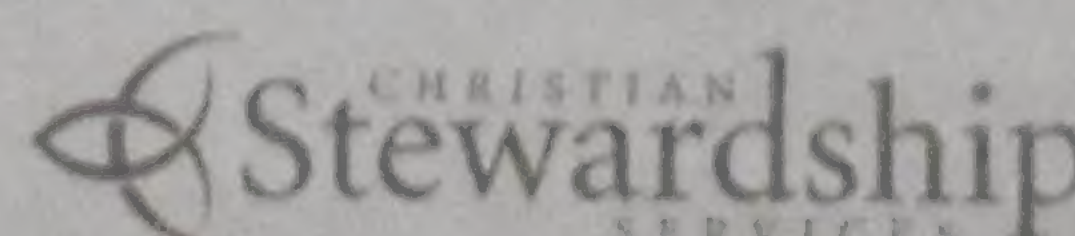
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Letters

Easter with Aunt Elizabeth

The day was April 8, 2012, a day on which we remember the rising of our Lord from the grave. It was a beautiful sunny day. From our sundeck, I could see the Cascade Mountains and Mount Baker covered with snow. With a deep blue sky, this presented an amazing picture of God's Creation. Looking down, I noticed two people and an elderly lady in a wheelchair. They stopped to rest and admire the garden that surrounds the pool.

I suddenly recognized the couple as my cousin John Hulstein and his wife Lynne, which meant the elderly lady was my dear Aunt Elizabeth Hulstein. She lives with us at Elim in the "Harrison" building, which houses people who are stricken with that terrible disease known as Alzheimer's. My Aunt Elizabeth, or Tante Lies, has severe dementia and no memory of today or yesterday.

I went downstairs to say hello.

"Tante Lies, how are you?"

She smiled her beautiful smile, eyes looking straight at me, but I knew there was absolutely no recognition. Sadness overwhelmed me, because I have so many lovely memories of my Tante Lies.

I took her hand in mine, leaned over towards her and spoke to her silently, only in my mind.

I said, "Tante Lies, do you remember that as a young boy I would take my bike and peddle to your home at the other side of Apeldoorn? Do you know there were several reasons for me to visit you? First of all, I loved you. I loved the way you greeted me. I can still hear you say, 'Oh, Ray, how nice to see you again!'"

I also visited because of the organ in your living-room. We had a pedal organ at home, but yours had stops and combinations. You would offer me a glass of lemonade and

say, 'Have some and then I make you earn it by playing something nice for me on the organ.' We would both end up singing your favourite song. Those days were beautiful, Tante Lies. I love you yesterday, today and tomorrow!"

As I stopped my silent speaking, I felt her hand on mine. She squeezed a little.

I turned to put my arms around her and, without thinking, asked out loud, "Oh Tante Lies, do you still remember me?" A bit of a silly question considering her illness and sad circumstances.

Yet at that moment, she gave me a wide smile and answered my question clearly! On this Easter Day, for just a moment, my aunt came out of her tomb of silence. She gave an answer that will stay with me forever.

As I walked back to our building, I noticed some trees that had been dormant for so long now opening up to show their beautiful flowers. The sun of that Easter Day had opened them and brought them to life again.

Dear Reader, you may not fully understand my emotions of that afternoon, which turned out to be nine days before her death. But you will surely understand my feelings of that Easter moment when I tell you my Tante Lies' answer. Squeezing my hand and with a great smile she had said:

"Of course I do! You are my Organ Player!"

"Thank You, Lord for that moment between me and my Aunt Elizabeth Hulstein-Kloosterman.

Keep her in your hands." >

Ray Hulstein
Elim Village, Surrey, B.C.



Dr. Hubert Krygsman,
President of Redeemer University College,
Invites you to our

30th
Anniversary
Gala

on
SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2013

The next phase of this amazing journey is before us. Join us as we renew our unwavering commitment to post-secondary education in Canada from a distinctly Christian worldview.

Reception at 5:00 pm.

Dinner at 6:00 pm.

featuring guest speaker Lorna Dueck

Choral Concert at 8:00 pm.

Tickets: Table of Ten: \$1,200 | Per Person: \$125

Please RSVP by April 2, 2013 to:
advancement@redeemer.ca (subject line: "Gala")
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